GENDER EQUALITY IN FAMILIES: THE CASE OF MIDDLE-CLASS BENGALI WOMEN IN CALCUTTA

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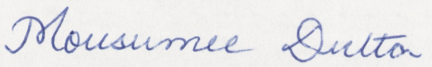
Except where otherwise indicated, the material contained in this thesis is my own work



Mousumee Dutta

For my parents

Devatosh and Sunanda

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis has been to examine gender equality in the lives of middle-class employed Bengali women in Calcutta, the capital of the Indian state of West Bengal. In Calcutta over the last twenty years the employment rate of women has increased, particularly amongst married women with small children. Has paid employment brought any changes in the domestic lives of these women? The specific objective of this research has been to examine the domestic lives of a group of urban married employed women and to assess whether their employment has had any impact on their lives. I study the differences in the domestic division of labour, decision-making and sex role attitudes between women in white-collar employment and those not in employment. My research compares the domestic lives of a group of urban married employed women with a group of women who are full-time housewives, and examines whether gender equality within families has been affected by women's work status or whether the traditional family role in which women do all household tasks and have a subordinate position in the family still persists. I assess whether other family members, particularly husbands of employed women, share housework and child care to a greater extent than in families where wives are not in paid employment. I also explore whether employed women have a more egalitarian relationship with their husbands in decision-making within the family than that of non-employed women. Lastly I study whether employed women are more liberal in their sex-role attitudes than their non-employed counterparts.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine gender equality within families of urban middle-class Bengali women in Calcutta, the capital of the Indian state of West Bengal. Since the 1970s middle-class women in Calcutta have been entering white-collar employment in significant numbers (Standing 1991). One might expect this movement into paid work to have implications for gender equality within families. For example, in 1970 the female working population was 4.43 per cent of the total working population in West Bengal; this increased to 5.97 per cent in 1981 (Government of India 1981). Though it is only a small increase, it is important because the percentage is steadily rising and also because it '...has taken place against a tradition of low female labour-force participation and a strongly entrenched ideology of female domesticity and dependency on male kin' (Standing 1991:7). We can postulate that this small increase is the beginning of an important process of change among urban middle-class Bengali women.

I examine whether there are differences in the domestic division of labour and decision-making patterns of middle-class Indian women in white-collar employment compared to those not in employment.[1] More specifically, the study examines whether there are any differences in family organisation, division of labour, decision-making, household management, economic autonomy and the

[1] All the employed women in the sample were in paid work outside the home.

sex role attitudes between the two groups. The study also assesses whether other family members, particularly husbands of employed women, share housework and child care to a greater extent than in families where wives are not in paid employment, and whether employed women are more involved in decision-making within the family than non-employed women. By comparing the domestic lives of a selected group of urban married Indian employed women with women who are full-time housewives, I examine whether gender equality within families has been affected by women's work status.[2]

Justification for the Study

In developing countries the traditional division of labour based on gender limits the opportunities for women in education, training and employment. A woman's opportunity for employment is often hindered by societal prejudices and a lack of necessary qualifications (Agarwal 1993; Menon and Bhasin 1993; Agarwal 1994). Since International Women's Year in 1975, several studies have pointed out that the status of women in developing countries continues to lag in every aspect behind that of women in developed countries (United Nations 1980). Of course, there are differences in the relative status of women from country to country, with women in first-world countries enjoying a higher status than in third-world countries.

Until recently most research on the effect of women's employment on the family focused on its effect on children (Powell and Steelman 1982; Tolman et

[2] All the husbands of the respondents in the sample were working in full-time jobs outside the home.

al. 1989). Some examined marital stability (Locksley 1980; Leslie 1982) while others examined household earnings (Oppenheimer 1982; Gerstel and Harriet 1989). Only recently have researchers begun to focus on the effect of women's (especially married women's) paid employment on the domestic division of labour (Christensen and Staines 1990; Warde and Hetherington 1993; Sullivan 1996).

There is now an abundance of literature on the status of women and employment in developed countries (Blumstein and Schwartz 1983; Berg 1988; Hochschild 1989; Haas 1990; Blair and Johnson 1992; Baxter 1993; Greenstein 1996). The main issue that has been raised in these studies is whether employment brings about gender equality, especially in the domestic lives of women. One of the main themes in earlier studies on the domestic division of labour has been the extent to which women's employment brings about changes in men's involvement in domestic labour (Pleck 1990; Rexroat 1990; Edgar 1992). While many people expected that married women's movement into paid work would result in more egalitarian work patterns within the home, most research shows that very little has changed (McAllister 1990; Suitor 1990; Bittman 1991; Baxter 1993).

Bittman found, for example, that women's labour accounts for 70 per cent of the total time spent in unpaid domestic work in Australia (Bittman 1991; Bittman and Pixley 1997). He concluded that any redistribution of domestic labour from women to men is slow and uneven. Similarly, Baxter (1993) concluded that, despite the fact that greater numbers of married women are entering paid employment, very little has changed in the home. The domestic

division of labour remains clearly segregated by gender. The amount of time spent on domestic tasks, and the nature of the allocation of these tasks between husbands and wives, is still based on gender. Women continue to do the bulk of housework. Baxter also noted that men who did increase their time on domestic work often did more child care than housework. Baxter (1993) suggests that this may be because child care is less monotonous and less boring than most household tasks. At the same time, caring for children may give them a feeling of achievement, fulfilment and satisfaction (see also Blumberg 1991; Lennon and Rosenfield 1994; DeMaris and Longmore 1996).

In India, questions about the extent to which women's domestic lives have improved over time were difficult to answer because researchers had paid little attention to this important topic. Before Independence in 1947, very little effort was made to study the domestic lives of either employed or non-employed women. Even the views of employed women were not given much importance by policy makers. It was only during the post-Independence era that the workloads, life conditions and health of women became topics of interest to committees and commissions established to monitor the social and economic development of the country. This shift has led to a change and we now have research on the social, economic and domestic lives of both rural and urban women.

However, most Indian research has not taken account of the profound differences between women in religion, ethnic background, class and geographic location. In order to overcome these problems I have restricted this study to only middle-class Hindu Bengali women.

The socio-cultural variations in India are tremendous. Each region has its own specific customs, folkways and norms which affect the lives of its members. Nonetheless, most of the existing literature claims to be general in scope. Much of this work has been carried out in the context of examining the level of physical and emotional exhaustion among employed wives (Khanna and Verghese 1978; Debi 1988; Joshi 1988; Chandrasekhar 1991; Bagwe 1995; Bagchi 1995; Bhadauria 1997).

Some studies challenge the assumption that women's position in India will automatically improve as the economy modernises (Banerjee 1989; Unni 1989; M. Sharma 1989; Kumar and Stanley 1992; Banerjee 1992; Chadha 1995; Aleem 1996). But the very opposite may have happened. When work moves from the household to the office it maybe women who lose. They may spend more time on both paid and unpaid work. But these studies must be read as subject to many limitations. First, they tend to be very small-scale, involving interviews with only a handful of women. Secondly, little attempt has been made to compare employed and non-employed women. Thirdly, studies on Indian women and their families have been primarily problem-oriented. There has been little emphasis on methodological issues or comparative analysis.

A review of the literature on Indian women also indicates that existing research on Bengali women is inadequate. What little research has been done mainly concerns the lives of Bengali women of the nineteenth century. It largely neglects the many changes that have taken place in Bengali women's lives since Independence and since India began the process of industrialisation (Chakraborty 1963, Borthwick 1984). Many changes have occurred since Independence, so

there is a real need for detailed examination of recent changes in women's lives. Accordingly, the initial impetus for this study was to move beyond this earlier work by examining more fully the condition of urban Bengali employed women, by focusing on the effect of employment on gender equality in their families.

This project can be seen as an exploratory micro-level study, focusing on gender equality in the families of married middle-class employed Bengali women in Calcutta. It will study women through the perspective of their work and seek to determine how work affects their family lives. It will examine whether these changes free women from their responsibilities within the domestic sphere, and give them greater autonomy and independence.

There is a tradition in India concerned with the status of women stemming from the early interest shown by political reformers on the subcontinent in matters related specifically to women. This concern for the status of women led to a proliferation of studies on women by Indian scholars (Ghosh 1989; Chandrasekhar 1991; Devasia and Devasia 1994; Chauhan 1996; Chandra 1997). Scholars agree that the greater the economic contribution of the woman, the more autonomy she has within the family. However, these studies do not consider both paid and unpaid work in studying the nature of division of labour and decision-making among these women. There is also a dearth of literature that deals in a rigorous and detailed manner with urban middle-class employed and non-employed Bengali women and the differences in their family lives, if any, brought about by employment. Of the better known Indian studies on women in the last 20 years, most have been rather generalised historical treatments of the status of

women from the time of the *Vedas* (religious scriptures)[3] to the role of women in the Freedom Movement in the years leading up to independence. Much of this literature, moreover, makes no distinction between different economic groups or between rural and urban women (Maurya 1988; Upadhyay 1991; Mankekar 1994; Rege 1996; Chatterji 1997).

It is clear that education, as well as economic emancipation, has led to changes in the family lives and status of women in India. Previous studies suggest that industrialisation and increased urban migration have led to changes in traditional views about masculinity and femininity, which in turn have affected such factors as household composition, residence patterns, kinship relationships, and male and female attitudes and behaviour (Jain 1988a; Pillai 1989; Upadhyay 1991; Kumar and Stanley 1992; Chaudhury 1994; Rajvanshi 1996). One study of sex role attitudes, marriage and career patterns among Indian college men and women suggests that the role played by males and females in Indian society is gradually changing (Ghadially 1988). The present study explores how far these changes hold true for women in the middle class Bengali community.

Life in Calcutta since Independence has changed profoundly. Until recent times, Bengali society actively discouraged women from working in what are usually described as white-collar jobs. The employment of urban middle-class Bengali women in white-collar occupations in the public sector is of recent origin (Standing 1991). This study examines whether employment in white-collar jobs brings about gender equality within Bengali families. It aims to improve our

[3] The Vedas are religious scriptures which date back to the Gupta period of Indian history (A.D. 300-500).

understanding of whether women's movement into white-collar employment contributes to gender equality in their family lives, and if so whether employment is the sole, or even the major, factor contributing to this phenomenon.

Why Focus on the Middle-Class?

I now address the questions of 'who are the middle-class?' and why this particular segment of the population has been selected for the study.

Social classes are defined as aggregates of individuals who occupy broadly similar positions in the scale of social prestige (Jain 1988b; Lakha 1988; Beteille 1996). Class is defined primarily by the ownership of property. Social honour is usually associated with property ownership. In India, social mobility in the class structure is open to individuals in principle but limited in practice (Driver 1984; Caplan 1985; Beteille 1992).

Class in India can be divided into three groups. Classes are social as well as economic groupings. At the top, there is the upper class, which includes the leading businessmen, the leading members of the government bureaucracy, and the leading intellectuals. Higher-income professionals, scientists, professional managers in industry and large merchants are also included in the upper class (Beteille 1992). The women of this group, if in employment, pursue paid employment for enjoyment and fulfilment and not because of economic necessity. The income they earn is not used in family expenses but gives them an independent source of finances. They are rich enough to employ several domestic servants. They often spend their leisure time in voluntary social activities which gives them prestige in society. People belonging to the upper class have significant property.

Below this group is the middle class, which includes the mass of clerks and relatively minor officials in government offices, private commercial and industrial firms, school teachers, working journalists, and small-scale industrialists. Members of this group usually have some property of their own. Economic pressures often compel middle-class women to take up paid employment. The typical jobs women of this class take up are teaching, or administrative and clerical jobs in the public service (Standing 1991; Karlekar 1991).

Finally, there are members of the lower class (working class) who usually do not have any property and are in unorganised jobs. Landless labourers, factory workers, and construction workers belong to this group. Most of them live in slums or congested colonies. They are barely literate and constitute the bulk of the urban poor. Many of them are first-generation migrants from rural areas who have come to the city for employment (A. Sharma 1993; Sen 1994; Chandavarkar 1994).

Calcutta was for many years the commercial and political capital of British India, and the Bengali middle class is the oldest and most deeply entrenched in the country. The middle class in India differs from the lower class (which is composed of workers such as agricultural labourers and industrial labourers) and from the elite class in terms of both wealth and lineage (Driver and Driver 1997).

The middle class in West Bengal and Calcutta has its roots in the British need for educated English-speaking Indians to administer the country under British rule. The British set up educational facilities in India for this purpose and explicitly encouraged men from the upper castes to avail themselves of the new opportunities. The British created the new middle class out of the existing public officials from Mughal times, out of the money lenders, and out of the literary class

of educated Brahmins (Siddique 1982; Shams 1991). So the middle class in West Bengal came to consist primarily of the educated professional groups, plus a minority of merchants and industrialists. The position of professionals in the class structure is ambiguous. They are wage-earners rather than employers, but the discrepancy between their income and that of manual labourers is sufficient to place them economically and socially closer to the larger-scale employers (Siddique 1982; Chaudhuri 1990). In this study I use the term 'middle-class women' to describe women drawn from a broad status group known as *bhadralok*[4] (Mc Guire 1983; Chakrabarty 1985)

Education facilitated women's entry into paid employment, especially middle-class women. Before the early part of this century only women from the lower classes worked outside the home. Women from the upper and middle classes stayed at home looking after the family and doing some domestic work, shared in many cases with domestic servants (Chanana 1990; Chowdhry 1994). Gradually women from these classes, especially the middle class, also started taking up paid employment outside the home.

However, even today women from the middle class face cultural and structural restrictions on the range of employment open to them. Their concentration in what were, traditionally, segregated and thus 'respectable' occupations such as teaching and medicine is a reminder that occupational profiles have a historical and cultural location in specific constructions of 'suitable' work for women. Women of this background were discouraged, traditionally, from entering paid employment (Jain 1988b; A. Sharma and Singh 1993). At present

[4] Literally, respectable people.

women from middle-class Bengali families are gaining a foothold in occupations which are deemed respectable, notably in teaching, medicine, the law and the public sector, where increasing demand for educational and medical services has opened up a range of acceptable gender-segregated positions. Such occupations continue to be regarded as ideal employment choices for middle-class Bengali women (Standing 1991; Karlekar 1991).

This study examines middle-class employed Bengali women because they are the ones whom Srinivas (1962) suggests have been subjected to the dual process of Sanskritisation and Westernisation.[5] That is, they are likely to have come from the upper strata of society, where the strictest constraints on women are the norm. However, at the same time they have succeeded in breaking out of these constraints and emerging from seclusion to enter the professions. It is amongst middle-class women, therefore, that we are most likely to find evidence of change in domestic labour patterns and in levels of autonomy and independence within the family.

I have also chosen to restrict my study to the middle class because it is the bearer of Bengali culture and customs[6] and also because it constitutes a comparatively large section of the Bengali community in Calcutta, and because

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[5] Sanskritisation is both a process of social mobility and an idiom in which mobility expresses itself. When there is Sanskritisation, mobility may be said to occur within the framework of caste, whereas Westernisation implies mobility outside the framework of caste. The Sanskritisation process must not, then, be confused with the acceptance of Western mores. Far from suggesting the collapse of the caste system, it indicates that the caste system is becoming more flexible and thus more likely to survive in the face of change. See M. N. Srinivas (1962:9).

[6] The two other classes that is the upper and the lower classes do not strictly follow Bengali traditions and customs. The upper class is more westernised whereas the lower class do not have the financial resources to adhere to traditional customs and ceremonies.

more women from this class enter white-collar employment than from any other socio-economic group. Further, because the Bengali middle-class constitutes a major percentage of the total population of Calcutta, it is accessible for a study of this nature. I have further restricted this study to white-collar positions of a research, clerical or junior administrative nature, because women employed in such white-collar occupations appear to have more economic independence than women employed in blue-collar jobs.

Caste and Women in India

Caste is a specific form of stratification found in Indian society. Each linguistic community in India can broadly be divided into four castes. The Brahmins or the priests, the Kshatriyas or the warriors, the Vaishyas or the merchants, and the Shudras or the common people. Groups outside these four categories are referred to as the *harijans* (the 'untouchables'). The four castes are further divided into a wide variety of sub-castes numbering about two hundred, each of them with a distinct name. Being born to a particular caste determines an individual's status in society. The caste system thus operates on a principle of hierarchy. Caste in India is generally related to occupation followed by different population groups. A caste generally considers some callings as their hereditary occupation and there is a common notion that these occupations are sanctioned by tradition.

However, since Independence some changes have occurred in the caste system. In the past, the caste system placed restrictions on the choice of occupation, which was hereditary in nature. This aspect of caste has undergone

some changes, and there is no longer such a strict relationship between caste and occupation. Thus, we now find women from higher castes previously not allowed to take up employment outside the home being employed in different types of white-collar work.

For a study of this nature, confining the sample to the upper-caste groups is important in order to minimise differences in customs and norms between different caste groups. The Bengali community, like any other community in India, is caste-bound and as a result there are differences between the day-to-day life practices of the upper and lower castes. The empirical manifestations of the workings of caste can be actually observed in everyday activities. A particular caste is a *de facto,* and often a *de jure,* endogamous unit, in that its members search for marriage partners within this group. This territorial endogamy on the part of a localised caste contributes to its structural identity and integrity as a group in the context of both the region and a city (Mitra et al. 1980; Lingam 1994; Shyamlal 1994).

Studies have shown that there is an inverse relationship between caste and fertility. For example, Brahmins and Kshatriyas have lower levels of fertility than Shudras (Mitra et al. 1980; Lingam 1994). Studies show that in Bengal, women from the two upper castes were the first to take up English education and paid employment outside the home. Thus, we can expect more educated employed women to belong to this group (Borthwick 1984; Standing 1991).

This thesis is not, however, a study of caste relations. So I do not examine how modernisation and development mediate social change in different castes. In this study disparities in the life styles between the castes is not of central importance because all women in the sample belonged to the two upper castes.

Caste in this sense does not affect the findings because caste has been held constant in this study.

Why Study Calcutta?

India has a huge population. It is not possible for any single researcher with limited funds and time to carry out a 'representative' survey. Even to study a huge city like Calcutta requires careful consideration of cultural and demographic differences. As a result this study is confined to the middle-class Bengali community residing in the metropolitan area of Calcutta.

Generally speaking, in India avenues of work open for women are concentrated in the big cosmopolitan towns or metropolitan centres (Debi 1988; Vatuk 1990; A. Kumar 1991; Pande 1992; Subbamma 1994). Calcutta has been selected for the study because:

- Calcutta is a very large city and changes in the lives of such a large population may influence the lives of women in other parts of India.

- It provides a cross-section of white-collar and other office-based employees in the public sector in India. Calcutta is an administrative rather than an industrial city, and the major employer in this city is the government. Hence, there is a large number of women employed in white-collar jobs in the public sector in Calcutta, in a wide variety of jobs. As employment in the public sector offers better security and does not always demand very high education, there are more women employed in this sector than in the private sector.

- Because variations in gender equality within families might also stem from variations in women's employment location, and since there is considerable

diversity in women's employment in Calcutta (ranging from domestic service and factory and construction labour to top management and administration), I considered it important to limit this variation by restricting the sample to one segment of the population.

- Calcutta, having the largest percentage of Bengalis in India, offered the best option since I wanted to study Bengali women on whom very little work has been done.

Research Issues

As already noted the main focus of the thesis is the relationship between the employment of women outside the home and gender equality within the family, especially the domestic division of labour, decision-making and changes in sex role attitudes. Simply put, the question is: do women in white-collar employment in the public sector have a more egalitarian domestic division of labour than non-employed women?

I measure differences in gender equality in families of Bengali women in terms of differences in the division of labour and the amount of freedom they enjoy in making important decisions within the household and in spending the family income. I also examine their conformity to, or deviance from, gender-determined and socially restricting behaviour patterns imposed by tradition. These concerns prompt the following questions:

- Does paid employment of wives facilitate a more non-traditional domestic division of labour within the dual-earner household than is the case in the single-earner household?[7]

- If there is a clear division of labour in domestic work in these households, is it specific to spouses or do other members of the family also play a role?

- Are employed Bengali women more satisfied with the domestic division of household chores and child care duties between themselves and their husbands than non-employed Bengali women?

Specific questions about decision-making within the family include the following:

- Does having a job promote a sense of social and economic independence among Bengali women?

- Does employment give married Bengali women more decision-making power at home?

- Does employment enable Bengali women to have more freedom in making final decisions about the purchase of property and household goods?

- Does employment enable Bengali women to decide the number of children they should have and thereby free them from the drudgery of repeated child bearing?

- Does employment help Bengali women to influence the distribution of power between spouses on household matters?

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[7] By 'non-traditional' division of labour I mean men sharing domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning the house, washing dishes, child care and so on.

- Does employment help Bengali women to discontinue bearing the major household responsibilities associated with performing multiple roles as worker, homemaker, mother and wife?

In relation to sex role attitudes, I focus on the following questions

- Has employment altered the values and expectations of urban middle-class Bengali women?
- Is there a difference in attitude towards paid employment among employed and non-employed women?
- Is there a difference in attitude between choice of life partners for their children among employed and non-employed women?
- Is there a difference in attitude towards the dowry system, divorce and widow remarriage among employed and non-employed women?
- Is there a difference in attitude towards equal property rights for women among employed and non-employed women?

Methodology

In this study I use two related methods of data collection: a self-completed questionnaire supplemented by in-depth interviews with selected respondents. The sample for the study was drawn from the population of Bengali women aged between 25 and 45 years who were currently married and had at least one university degree. In the absence of any official data regarding employed women, I drew up a list of all women employed in five government offices working in three major occupational categories: researchers, administrative workers and technical

personnel.[8] While collecting the names of Bengali employed women, I noted their exact occupational designations. A sample of 50 employed women was selected from these three occupational groups.

I surveyed only Hindu middle-class Bengali women, so as to eliminate the confounding influence of religious diversity. In India there are several different religions, each with distinct norms for women. The influence of religion on the lives of Bengali women cannot be underestimated. It is an important issue affecting their status and life patterns. Hinduism has a distinctive influence on Bengali women and promotes distinctive role models. In India, Hinduism is the most significant religion, although there are also smaller Christian and Muslim communities.[9] The Hindu religion teaches that a woman should be modest, loving, caring of others, and subject to the rule of her husband's or father's authority. In Bengal, religion plays a very important part in the process of socialisation of women, especially in rural areas. Religious norms define the position and role of women within the family and in the wider society. As Calman (1992) reports:

> Religion in India is pertinent not only to the cultural valuation of women, but to their legal position. In India, religion is also law. In most matters pertaining to family life - marriage, divorce, inheritance, guardianship of children - religious law is recognized by the state. Modern India continues

[8] These three categories constitute the bulk of the female white-collar work force in Calcutta. Data were collected from five government offices: the Indian Institute of Chemical Biology, Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science, Central Glass and Ceramic Research Institute, Department of Telephone Exchange and Calcutta *Doordarshan* (Calcutta Television Broadcasting).

[9] Hindus constitute 82.64 per cent of the total population followed by Muslims (11.35 per cent) and then Christians (2.43 per cent). Source: Government of India 1981, Series 1, Paper 3.

> the practice adopted by the British of letting Hindu law govern the Hindu community and Muslim law the Muslim community; the state also recognizes Christian, Parsi and Jewish law (Calman 1992:53).

Data collected through questionnaires and in-depth interviews enabled me to identify some ideal types, for example, women who irrespective of their economic position, are traditional and lack autonomy within the family; women who have some autonomy within the family; and women who are egalitarian and enjoy equal autonomy with their husbands. The interviews covered in detail various questions on the domestic division of labour and the decision-making and sex-role attitudes of women. Women were given the opportunity to talk about different domestic arrangements in their households and to give their opinions on the issues raised. The questionnaire covered standard demographic items, histories of employment, family structure, decision-making and labour practices, as well as questions on attitudes.[10] I decided to use both questionnaires and in-depth interviews for collecting data because this strategy minimised the limitations of either methods. Areas that were not covered by the questionnaires but were important to the study were taken up in the in-depth interviews and vice versa.[11]

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[10] The subject thus selected as a sample unit was individually and personally interviewed on the basis of the structured schedule. The subjects were requested to be candid and honest in answering questions and anonymity was assured. Care was taken that their answers should reflect their true feelings and reactions with regard to particular issues. They were assured that the information given by them would be treated as strictly confidential and would be used for no purpose other than that of research.

[11] The qualitative data clarified the nature of division of labour and decision-making within the family by providing information which could not be obtained by quantitative methods.

The Comparison Group

Because one of the objectives of the study was to test whether there is any difference in the family lives of middle-class Bengali women in white-collar employment in the public sector and middle-class non-employed Bengali women, another sample of 50 middle-class non-employed Bengali women was selected who, except for employment status, matched those in the employed sample on all other characteristics. For this purpose, a survey of 100 randomly selected households was conducted to collect information on non-employed women.[12] The comparison group thus forms half of the 100 women selected for the study.[13]

The non-employed women were also selected on the basis of random sampling. Multi-storey apartments were chosen and names of non-employed women were collected from the secretaries of such complexes.[14] Once the list was ready women were chosen from the list by random sampling.

How the Research was Conducted

My personal knowledge of Calcutta provided an invaluable opportunity to formulate a precise research plan. In the early stages of the fieldwork public offices known to be employing women were contacted. After initial visits with the

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[12] Note that all the non-employed women were full-time housewives when the survey was conducted in the latter half of 1996. Eighteen of the non-employed women had worked in the past but left their jobs because of family constraints.

[13] The base for selecting the non-employed group was 100 women, from which I selected 50 women.

[14] All the multi-storey apartments were geographically located in middle-class areas of Calcutta.

respective Heads of the offices were completed,[15] a schedule and questionnaire was finalised and the questionnaires were administered to the respondents who were selected by random sampling. This questionnaire formed the primary data source and covered a number of topics from a family profile of respondents to qualitative explorations of values and attitudes. On the basis of the questionnaire responses fifteen employed women and fifteen non-employed women were selected for the in-depth interviews.[16]

This approach involved structured and semi-structured interviewing over a period of time. Further visits were made to talk informally with women. In the course of the discussion several other topics were discussed to make the interview more interesting. Every attempt was made to let the discussion develop naturally and spontaneously by allowing the respondents to move from one topic to another as happens in ordinary conversation.

Relevance of the Study

By conducting a study of this type I hope to make a contribution to research in sociology and women studies in general, and also to add to existing literature on women's studies in India in particular. More specifically I hope to:

- Analyse the link between gender, employment and the domestic sphere. All three are a matter of concern for students interested in Indian women and society

[15] This was done to get a list of potential respondents.

[16] I give a more detailed description of the way the study was conducted in Chapter 4.

- Provide data on employed women in a society where paid employment for women is a recent phenomenon
- Provide a baseline study of life patterns among middle-class employed Bengali women in Calcutta that is replicable. Future studies of the same group of women in other metropolitan cities of India will be able to assess similarities and differences
- Add to the ethnography of Calcutta and supplement Indian studies on urban middle-class employed women and
- Provide some assessment of the effectiveness of Indian legislation on gender inequality.

This study will fit alongside other regional studies of women conducted in different parts of the world (Peitchinis 1989; Hantrais 1990; Glucksman and Glazer 1994; Bagihole 1994; Figes 1994). Only by understanding the specific problems faced by women in different societies can we begin to develop appropriate solutions to gender inequality in developing societies.

The issue of the status of women is not a new one (Standing 1991). The debates of the UN Decade of Women have placed the question of women's status firmly in the context of policy issues and strategies. One such debate has centred on the economic factor. Women's skills and potentials constitute a wasted human resource if they are not utilised in the labour force. Social equity arguments focus on the fact that women have an equal right to employment (Peitchinis 1989). In the 'women and development' literature women's skills and potential and their rights to employment have often been combined into a general concern with women's 'status' (Schwartz 1988; Figes 1994). Is status improved by entering employment?

Is employment creation a useful general policy prescription for improving the status of women? (Standing 1991:166). My investigation also seeks to explore some of these questions that are not simply specific to women in India but apply also to women in general.

In India the status of women has traditionally been low compared to that in Western societies. Bengali culture has traditionally denied independence to women (Sinha 1987; Agarwal 1993; A. Kumar 1993; Chaudhury 1994; Bhaduria 1997).

Organisation of the Study

The thesis is divided into 8 chapters. Chapter 2 begins with a review of literature on women and paid work in Indian society. The main themes and issues in the literature are identified as well as the shortcomings. Chapter 3 provides the data on selected demographic and social characteristics of India and Calcutta. Chapter 4 discusses both the methodology of the study and the socio-economic background of the respondents. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 present the results. Chapter 5 focuses on the domestic division of labour; Chapter 6 on patterns of decision-making within the family and Chapter 7 on social attitudes. All of the chapters are primarily concerned with the effect of employment on women's position within the family. Finally, Chapter 8 summarises the main findings of the study and draws out implications for the life patterns of women in India. Some suggestions are also made in terms of the theoretical implications of my findings.

CHAPTER 2

THE PATH TO EQUALITY FOR INDIAN WOMEN

Introduction

This chapter begins with a brief history of women's status in India, focusing on how it has changed over time. The first section describes the various constitutional and legal reforms which have been introduced in an effort to help women gain equality in the social, economic, political and domestic spheres. The second section considers the effect of education and employment on the domestic lives of middle-class Bengali women. The last section of the chapter outlines the background for the current project, the ways in which the study adds to existing knowledge, and how my analysis contributes to research on middle-class employed Bengali women in India.

While some social scientists have suggested that industrialisation and economic development bring about changes in the lives of women and increase in women's status, it must be borne in mind that industrialisation and economic development alone have not led, and will not lead to an increase in women's status (Kang 1997; Menon and Bhasin 1998). For the improvement of women's status there have to be laws passed which will protect their rights.

Constitutional and Legal Policies on Women's Status in India

In order to appreciate the present position of Indian employed women it is important to have a clear picture of the formal changes in their status since

Independence and the constitutional and legal policies that have helped to bring about these changes. This section outlines the different fundamental rights that have been guaranteed by the Constitution of India as they affect the status of Indian women. Women played an active and important role in India's freedom struggle (Swarup and Bisaria 1991; Kang 1997; Menon and Bhasin 1998). As Maurya (1988) points out, 'women participated in large numbers in the agitation against the Partition of Bengal[1] and also in the Home Rule Movement'[2] (Maurya 1988:4). He further asserts that, more than any other factor, participation in the national movement contributed to the emancipation of Indian women.

Thus, with the coming of Independence in 1947 women's struggle for equality took a big step forward. A. Basu (1991) expresses a similar view, noting that by joining the freedom struggle women became conscious of their subjugated position and the need to overcome it if the struggle was to succeed. The National Plan of Action for women, introduced in 1976, provides guidelines for formulating policies and programs for the welfare and development of women in the country.

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[1] The real confrontation between Lord Curzon as the then Governor General of India and the nationalist intelligentsia came through the Partition of Bengal in 1905. The size of the Bengal Presidency had worried many at various times, and there was an increasing interest in the development of Assam into a more viable province. William Ward's proposal (as the then Chief Commissioner of Assam) was revived by Bengal's new Lt. Governor Andrew Frazer in a note on 28 March 1903, and accepted by Curzon in a minute on territorial redistribution in India (1 June 1903). Between December 1903 and the formal announcement of 19 July, a transfer plan was transformed into a full-scale partition by Frazer, Risley and Curzon, with the new province of 'East Bengal and Assam' eventually including Chittagong, Dacca and Rajsahi divisions, Hill Tippera and Malda, apart from Assam (Sarkar 1987; Chatterjee 1995).

[2] The Home Rule Movement was started in 1916 by Bal Gangadhar Tilak and was confined to Maharashtra and Karnataka. The activities of the Home Rule Movement consisted in organising discussion groups and reading-rooms in cities, mass-scale pamphlets and lecture tours (Sarkar, 1987; Chatterjee 1995).

In September 1985 a separate Department of Women and Child Development was set up under the newly created Union Ministry of Human Resource Development. The aim was to revitalise existing development programs for women and children. The development of equal opportunities through different policies and programs opened up various avenues that have encouraged changes in the status of employed women in India. The National Policy Document on Education (1986) proposed a special emphasis on the removal of disparities and the equalisation of educational opportunities by attending to the specific needs of women (Ramu 1989; Devasia and Devasia 1990; Arora 1990; R. Sharma 1996b, 1996c, 1996d).

The two most important pieces of Union legislation for women after independence were the *Hindu Marriage Act, 1955* and the *Hindu Succession Act, 1956*. These Acts curtailed a Hindu man's right to polygamy for the first time and permitted a variety of 'at fault' divorces after a three year waiting period. Included among the grounds for divorce were adultery, conversion to another religion, polygamy and convictions having to do with rape, sodomy, or bestiality. The *Hindu Succession Act, 1956* was perhaps the most revolutionary of the Acts passed in this decade. It conferred for the first time absolute rights over the property possessed by a Hindu man to his widow.[3]

Moreover, the *Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956* makes the consent of the wife necessary for an adoption. The *Hindu Marriage Act, 1955* and

[3] Now women are fully entitled to receive their share of ancestral property. If a man dies intestate, absolute inheritance rights are to be vested in his widow, mother, sons, daughters and their immediate heirs. For the first time the law generated certain inheritance rights to daughters.

the *Special Marriage Act, 1954* conferred upon a girl the right to repudiate a childhood marriage whether the marriage had been consummated or not.

The introduction of these Acts have changed the lives and conditions of urban women in India to a considerable extent. *The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976* established the principle of equal pay for equal work. As a result of this law, it became the duty of the employer to pay equal wages to men and women employees not just for the same work but also for work of a similar nature. It also prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex at the time of recruiting men and women employees.

The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1983 deals with a variety of offences including rape, *dowry death*[4] and the mental and physical harassment of women.[5] This Act also provides for a thorough inquiry by the police or a magistrate following the death of a woman within seven years of her marriage. The investigating officer is empowered to order a post-mortem in such cases. The *Child Marriage Restraint (amendment) Act, 1976* raised the legal age of marriage for girls from 15 to 18 and for boys from 18 to 21 (Maurya 1988; Sangari and Vaid 1989; Chaudhary 1995; Raizada 1996; Verghese 1997).

These pieces of legislation passed during 1975-1985 were aimed at establishing legal equality between men and women. Although from a Western

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[4] The word dowry means money, goods or estate that a woman brings with her during marriage. The word dowry death which is associated with the word dowry means the unnatural death (either murder or suicide) of a new bride either by physical or emotional torture by her in-laws and/or the husband for not bringing enough money or goods that was demanded or negotiated by them.

[5] Among other things, as a result of this Act cruelty in the form of mental and physical torture or incitement to suicide of a woman by her husband or husband's relatives is now liable to punishment.

standpoint the Acts make it clear that equality for women in India lags a considerable way behind the situation of women in Western countries, they mark an important turning point in the fight for equality for Indian women.

The framers of the Indian Constitution also recognised that sexual equality was a crucial factor for national development. It was evident to them that, in order to eliminate inequality and to provide enforceable opportunities for the exercise of human rights, it was necessary to promote the educational and economic interests of women and to provide formal restraints against social injustice and exploitation (Maurya 1988; Raizada 1996; Kant 1997). To attain these national objectives, the Constitution guarantees certain fundamental rights and freedoms. These include freedom of speech, protection of life, and personal liberty. Article 14 of the Indian Constitution ensures 'Equality before the Law' and Article 15 prohibits any discrimination. The government's 'Directive Principles of State Policy' are based on the philosophy that the state is obliged to protect the interests of the weak and traditionally vulnerable members of the society, so that the whole populace enjoys substantive equality and not just a theoretical version of equality.

The Directive Principles of State Policy which concern women directly are: Article 39 (a) 'the right to an adequate means of livelihood for men and women equally'; Article 39 (e) 'protection of health and strength of workers- men and women' and Article 42 'just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief' (Maurya 1988; Bagchi 1995). Table 2.1 lists these legislations in summary form.

Table 2.1 Indian Legislation relating to Equality since Independence

Concept or principle	Legislative source	Constitutional source	Date in force	Whether effective or not
Equality before law		Article 14	1950	Effective for rich, urban upper class women, has had some effect on urban middle-class women but very minor effects on both urban and rural poor lower-class women.
Right to an adequate means of livelihood for both men and women equally		Article 39 (a) of the Directive Principles of State Policy	1950	Effective for rich, urban class, some effect on urban middle class very little effect on lower class especially in rural areas.
Protection of health and strength of workers, men and women		Article 39 (e) of the Directive Principles of State Policy	1950	Effective in public service and multi-national organisations. Very minor effect in unorganised sector of paid work especially in rural areas.[6]
Judicial separation of couples	The Special Marriage Act	The Indian Constitution	1954	Has had some effect on urban upper and middle-class women but very minor effect on the rural poor
Outlawing of polygamy	The Hindu Marriage Act. Section 5 (1)		1955	Effective for upper and middle-class women in urban areas. Minor effect for poor rural women.
At fault divorces	The Hindu Marriage Act. Section 5 (1)		1955	Has not been very effective for either urban or rural women.
Legalisation of the adoption of children by both men and women	The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act.		1956	More effective for both men and women in urban areas than in rural areas.
Equal property right	The Hindu Succession Act		1956	Minor effects for all classes of women in both urban and rural areas.
Just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief		Article 42	1973	Effective in government and private organisations. Very minor effects on unorganised sector in both rural and urban areas.
Marriage age for both males and females	The Child Marriage Restraint (amend) Act	The Indian Constitution	1976	Some effect on both urban upper and middle class but very minor or almost no effect on both urban and rural lower class.
Equal pay for equal work		Article 39 (d) of the Directive Principles of State Policy	1976	More effective in organised sector of paid work. Very little effect on unorganised sector of paid work in both rural and urban areas.
Protection from death relating to dowry, mental and physical harassment and rape	The Criminal Law Amendment Act	The Indian Constitution	1983	Has had very minor effect for all classes of women of both urban and rural areas.

[6] Organised sector of paid work includes all types of white-collar jobs whereas unorganised sector of paid work includes all types of blue-collar jobs.

Women in India have also gained some access to positions of political power. L. Devi (1982) writes:

> The Provincial Legislatures of India from 1921 onwards conferred the franchise upon women on equal terms with men. In 1923 the Central Legislature also granted women the right to vote in elections to that body. Once in legislatures, they found places in parliamentary committees, government delegations etc. The scope for promotion in government services also widened. Women have become ministers, deputy ministers and parliamentary secretaries; they have become governors and ambassadors. The number of women in the state legislatures also has been significant. They have held responsible party positions, conducted election campaigns and in other ways shown their capacity for organisational and leadership qualities (L. Devi 1982: 13-14).

These changes have contributed to other improvements in the life chances of women in India. Studies point out that the entrenchment of equality between the sexes in the Constitution enabled the passage of a variety of laws and the development of deliberate measures aimed at the improvement of the status of women in post-independent India. The first set of reforms was directed at the elimination of laws (marriage, maintenance, inheritance, guardianship) which had historically propagated inequality. Legal reform included access to education, a rise in the legal age of marriage so as to prevent child marriages, the right to inherit property, access to abortion and divorce, the prohibition of dowry, and the recognition of widow remarriage. All of these legal reforms have affected the life patterns of women in India. Until 1954, Indian women did not enjoy a very favourable position under the law. It was only in 1955-56, when the Parliament passed statutes reforming the Hindu law relating to marriage and divorce, succession, adoption and guardianship, that Indian women attained formal legal

rights equal to those of men (Mehta 1987; Ramu 1989; Carroll 1989; Parashar 1992; Khanna 1998).

Thus, we see that formally the Constitution of India guarantees equality of opportunity and status to men and women. It directs that women shall not only have equal rights and privileges with men but also that the state shall make provisions both general and special for the welfare of women. As significant as these legal advancements are, it is clear that alone they are not enough. As the situation in many Western countries has shown, legal machinery can play only a limited role in the economic emancipation of women (Beechey and Perkins 1987; Elliot 1996; Sainsbury 1996). Women in India still have a long way to go to achieve practical equality with men. Legal reform cannot by itself eradicate gender injustice. For example, in rural areas in particular many women still consider it improper to seek legal redress when their rights are violated. Even in urban centres measures such as more liberal divorce laws, the legalisation of abortion, or the anti-dowry legislation, all of which were introduced specifically for the liberation of women and to give them equal rights with men, often fail because women remain unconvinced about the propriety of using them (Butalia 1985; Chitnis 1987; Kapur 1996; Vidya 1997).

Formal rights are restricted by 'social reality'. For instance, economic necessity often leads women to forgo their employment rights. Poverty in rural areas compels women to take up any available work. Since unemployment is high they are obliged to accept the terms of the employers, who often knowingly evade the requirements of the law. Thus, granting equal rights in law will not be sufficient to end gender inequality. Attitudes and traditions do not change simply

as a result of changes in the law. As the experience of women in Western industrial nations has shown, legal change is only the first step in the long path to equality. Equal rights for women have to be made a reality through changes in social attitudes and practices and the provision of concrete alternatives to traditional practices.

One thing that emerges from the discussion so far is that the movement for women's equality is part of the wider movement for democratic rights, human rights and basic equality for all individuals. The contemporary women's movement is global. A common concern with improving the position of women in society does not diminish the importance of political, economic and cultural differences (Ferree and Hess 1985). Despite their diversity of experience and status, women have now, to a surprising degree, begun to unite on common ground. They share a sense of inequality of opportunity and the injustice of traditionally imposed inferiority, whether in family, social, economic or political settings.

The United Nations, which sponsored the International Decade for Women beginning in 1976, has been a mechanism for focusing world attention and setting standards for action. It was during this decade that India introduced legislation to benefit women. Activities associated with the United Nations declaration of the International Women's Year and the Women's Decade rank high among external influences on the women's movement in India. For example, in India a national commission on the status of women was formed in response to the declaration.

The earlier Status of Women Committee Report (1974) had already pinpointed areas in which there was a marked inferiority in women's position. This report on gender inequality documented higher female mortality rates, lower female education and incomes and lower female access to health care and political representation than that of males (National Committee on the Status of Women 1971-1974).

Papanek and Mazumdar (1991) point out that few other governments responded as India did to the United Nations request to member governments for a report on each country's initiatives (1991:8). Whatever the source of outside influence, the women's movement in India has fashioned itself to meet its particular situation. The government has also tried to provide its own specific solution to its problems by enacting different laws to protect women's rights. To a large extent the developmental programs for women in India had their roots in the global women's movement; but once the movement had gathered some momentum, it was able to add specific issues like bride burning and dowry death to its agenda. Later, autonomous women's groups could obtain some success by focusing public attention on violence against women, and by pressing the courts and legislators to reform laws, specifically laws about rape and domestic violence (Katzenstein 1989:67).

Overall the legal position of women in India has improved considerably since Independence. Women now enjoy similar formal rights of access to education and employment compared to men. However, there is still a long way to go to full equality, particularly for women in rural areas.

The next section reviews previous research on paid work and the status of women in India which has a direct link to the concerns of this thesis. I have examined the general changes in constitutional and legal policies and social reforms that have affected the status of women in India and now focus more specifically on education and employment, which are major factors affecting the family lives of middle-class Bengali employed women in India.

The Effect of Education on Women's Status in India

The emergence of the industrial era in India, coincided with its Independence and a new conception of the work ethic. Consequently a new lifestyle emerged in India. During the immediate post-independence period, attitudes toward women's education underwent a marked change. Education expanded and India now provides schooling from the ages of 5 to 17 (classes I to XII) for both sexes. In most States, education is compulsory to class VII[7] and free to class VIII, after which a small fee is charged, depending on family income.[8]

According to the New Education Policy of India, the then Prime Minister of India Narashima Rao announced in 1987 that education would be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. Special emphasis has been laid on vocational education with the purpose of linking education with jobs. Despite such efforts there is still a disparity in vocational outcomes among men and women in India (Devasia and Devasia 1990; R. Sharma 1996b).

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[7] Department of Social Welfare, 1981:Table 4.35, pp. 181-182.

[8] Even though education is free up to class VIII, there are additional expenses which poor parents may not be able to afford.

The spread of education after 1947 was accelerated by the creation of jobs in new branches of expanding commercial and industrial activity which needed to be filled by persons with educational qualifications and professional training. As a result, women began to enter medicine, engineering, the administrative services, politics, law, teaching, business and the mushrooming manufacturing industries. As education became more accessible (especially to people in urban areas), industries and organisations came to require more and more infrastructural support, and as women's economic contribution began to enhance the quality of a family's lifestyle, it gradually became obvious that employed women in India were here to stay.

In India education is an important factor which determines the status, both social and economic, of a person. Agarwal (1993) shows that women's education helps to break down the traditional custom of caste endogamy. Education has also encouraged a sense of equality in the conjugal relationship, both in attitudes and behaviour (Joshi and Liddle 1986; Dak 1986; Devasia and Devasia 1990; R. Sharma 1996b; 1996c; 1996d). Research by Chaurasia (1994) shows that educated women also develop specific social values and social attitudes which they then transmit to their children. Such research findings suggest that the general spread of women's education in India has implications for an increasing trend toward female employment, especially among middle-class women in metropolitan areas. Education has played an important part directly and indirectly in women's employment. Studies show that there is a correlation between the educational level of women and their employment. The more education a woman

has, the more likely she is to be in the labour force (Parikh and Garg 1989; Agarwal 1993; R. Sharma 1996b). L. Devi (1982) writes:

> With increased opportunities for education, provided by society to sustain the tempo of industrialisation, women began to enter the school system in large numbers. Once educated, their road to the world of employment was smooth and straight. More and more women now have the opportunity to pursue higher education and more of them exercise this option (L. Devi 1982:16).

Middle-class urban women who aspire to a career have opportunities for professional or technical education, because the Constitution provides equal opportunities for everyone irrespective of sex (Maurya 1988; Anker et al. 1988; Krishnaraj 1991; R. Sharma 1996d).

The cultural image of a woman and her position in society are now determined to a great extent by education. The desire for a higher standard of living and the acceptance of women's employment have also been factors in creating a positive attitude towards women's education. An educated woman is now more acceptable as a bride than one without education because of her potential for employment (Srivastava 1985; Krishnaraj 1988; Pande 1992; Banerjee 1995; Bakshi 1998).

Agarwal (1993) argues that education, employment and exposure to urbanism have moved middle-class women towards modernity. In effect, the expansion of women's education has produced women graduates with modern views. These women have developed an attitude favourable to female education and female employment. They favour economic independence among women in society. Moreover, the general change in social climate that has taken place since

Independence has also encouraged many educated middle-class women to take up paid employment, a trend which has changed their family lives (Talwar 1983; Swaminathan 1990; Dhawan 1995; Tandon 1998; Rangathan 1998).

The above observations are reinforced by research showing that education is a powerful tool for democratisation and development (Devasia and Devasia 1990). Education not only helps a woman to achieve higher social status; it also provides her with new insights and reinforces the idea that she is a distinct individual with rights and duties, able to make and change her world. She can put herself at a distance from her environment, think ahead by creating mental images of the future as it should be for her, and act on situations that affect her life and surroundings.

In India, level of education is significant in determining the chances of obtaining a white-collar job. Once a woman is educated, the possibilities of her entering gainful employment increase dramatically. Acquisition of a college degree usually signifies an intention to work for pay (Mathur 1992; Ahmad 1996; Giri 1998; Kalawati 1994).

The view that in India, especially among middle-class women, education has worked as a factor motivating women to enter paid employment is a major reason for focusing on this topic. The experience of women in Western countries has shown that the movement of married women into paid employment has not led automatically to great gender equality within the family or in paid work (Baxter 1993; Bittman and Pixley 1997). In India some have argued that the focus of patriarchy has shifted, rather than declined, as a result of these developments (Agarwal 1988; Mathur 1992; Ahmad 1996; Giri 1998). Therefore, this study

examines whether increased access to employment among middle-class Bengali women has provided them with the means of economic independence and self-determination.

The Effect of Employment on Women's Status in India

Employment is one of the important avenues for significant change in the family lives of middle-class employed women in India. Studies have shown that a major factor contributing to improvements in the status of women is a change in the structure of the economy which has drawn women into paid production (Maurya 1988; Ramu 1989; Standing 1991; Purushothaman 1998). Mahajan (1989) shows that the key to an improvement in the position of a woman at home is her access to an independent income. This view has been supported by others (Maurya 1988; R. Kumar 1993). Economic pressures in the middle class are often identified as a reason for the employment of women, and often a wife's income is necessary to maintain the family's standard of living. Also, it has become customary for young middle-class women to be employed before marriage (Ramu 1989; R. Sharma 1996a). L. Devi (1982) shows that 'in the case of the well-to-do strata of society, the desire to use one's time in socially meaningful ways was perhaps the major reason for employment' (L. Devi 1982:9).

Several authors suggest that employment has an effect on the family lives of middle-class employed women in India. The capacity to make independent decisions, interact with various types of people and hold high official positions enabled women to bring about a change in their life patterns (Maurya 1988; Ramu 1989; K. Sharma 1994). Talwar (1983) in her study on Rajasthan (once a

stronghold of the *purdah*[9] system) presents a different picture. Her study was based on 400 employed and 400 non-employed women. The employed women were selected randomly from the population of employed women in the city and the non-employed women were selected through sampling. She argues that:

> Most (58 per cent) of the middle-class women continued to be employed because of economic pressures. Some (10.8 per cent) reported that they wanted to fill a need for accomplishment and 1.8 per cent were employed because they wanted to attain recognition by proving themselves able to compete successfully with men in activities in which they were once debarred (Talwar 1983:40-41).

Sinha (1987) and Mishra (1993) claim that employment helps women participate in decisions concerning such issues as their husbands' jobs, changes in place of residence and their children's schooling. Another study by Srivastava (1985) shows that employment affects the different dimensions of women's behaviour and their lifestyles both within and outside the family. He compares two groups of women, employed and non-employed, from different income groups. He finds that employed women tend to plan their families in such a manner that interference with their work is minimised. There is also evidence that employment affects family composition and the way domestic responsibilities are shared in the household.

After the First World War, significant changes took place in the Indian economy. Many women belonging to the urban proletariat and the rural artisan class were beset by poverty and were forced to take up manual work to support

[9] A custom where women covered their faces with veils so that strangers, especially men, could not see them and they were required to live in secluded living quarters.

their families. After the Second World War even the middle classes were economically affected. Women from these classes also began to work to supplement the family income (Jacobson and Wadley 1992; Joseph 1997; Kaushik and Sharma 1998). These middle-class women turned to college education in order to secure employment (Jha 1980; Arora 1990). This new phenomenon attracted the attention of Indian scholars and some empirical studies were undertaken to examine these revolutionary social changes in the attitudes of the middle-class employed women, and the new roles they began to play in various spheres of social life (Sethi 1989; Devasia and Devasia 1990).

Some of these women came to realise that paid work helps to bring changes within the family, especially in attitudes (Mehta 1981; Krishnaraj 1988; Mitter 1991). Family members began to support female education and female employment. They also believed that women should not remain dependent on men in an economic sense; they favoured the economic independence of women in society (Reddy 1986; Basu and Basu 1992; Upadhyay 1997). The exposure of middle-class employed women to mass communication media and their association with different organisations have substantially changed the attitudes of employed middle-class women in India (Ramu 1989; Devasia and Devasia 1990; Dixit 1998). Chopra (1993) also claims that women's participation in elections at different levels of the political system has led to attitudinal change towards different social arrangements, including marriage, family, education, social norms and customs.

Regarding employment and the change in the domestic lives of employed women, some authors argue that dual-earner families adopt an egalitarian style to

decide domestic matters (Augustine 1982; Gulati 1982; Mishra 1993; Menon 1998). Also, in dual-earner families recreational activities tend to be couple-centred. Employed women's work is seen as enhancing the primacy of the conjugal unit by providing numerous opportunities for shared activities, which in turn sustain and reinforce companionship and communication.

Industrialisation and urbanisation have also led to an increase in the number of households which consist solely of nuclear families. The type of family which forms the basis of the Indian Constitution, as is evident from the preamble and fundamental rights, is an egalitarian nuclear family. Research on nuclear families in India shows that such families provide a setting where the configuration of role models is different from that in a large joint family (Srivastava 1985; Vatuk 1990; Tandon 1998). The family provides a setting where a sense of inclusion, well-being and positive support from concerned people is experienced. There is also a sense of personal involvement. The female child from such a family tends to be committed to autonomy and to adopt a stance in which she is less likely to be subdued, controlled or made economically helpless and dependent.

A further group of studies shows that the establishment of nuclear families in India has led to an environment in which women gain greater opportunity to exercise choice (Jolly 1986; Sethi 1989; Sahay 1998). In nuclear families women have more freedom to move outside the home and more power to make decisions about financial matters or household affairs. The nuclear family is less restrained by traditional modes of female behaviour such as choice of life partner, divorce, widow remarriage, rights to property and family planning.

Overall the nuclear family has led to various changes in interpersonal relations among its members that tend to increase women's status (Reddy 1986; Arora 1990; Mishra 1993; Devi 1998).

However, several researchers studying urban Indian families argue that there is little doubt that the joint family[10] as a social institution is still held by most Indians as an ideal (Swaminathan 1990; Sinha 1993). It coexisted and continues to coexist with extended and nuclear family systems (Augustine 1982; Srivastava 1985). Moreover, even urban educated Indians who have not been exposed to the traditional joint family system ideologically support joint families because of their evident advantages to spouses and their children (Augustine 1982; Srivastava 1985).[11] Research has shown that women living in nuclear families play a greater role in decision-making than those who live in extended households (Bjorkman 1986; Parthasarathy 1988; Jain 1994). The woman is emancipated because she is no longer subordinate to her mother-in-law or other elderly women (Srivastava 1985; Sahay 1998).

Another problem which the nuclear family helps to address concerns female hierarchy, which is predicated upon gender hierarchy. The female hierarchy is a means whereby men delegate control over women to women themselves, especially in domestic matters, with older females having authority

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[10] The term 'joint family' refers to a family where, besides the married couple, either the parents of the husband or his married brother and his wife and children are also present and share a common kitchen. An 'extended family' is one where, besides the married couple their unmarried daughters, son and his wife and children live and share a common kitchen. A 'nuclear family' consists only of a married couple and their children (Kolenda 1987; Saraswati and Kaur 1993).

[11] However,for practical purposes they may prefer the nuclear family because it enhances solidarity between spouses, and solidarity between parents and their children.

over younger ones. Roy (1975), in her book on Bengali women, wrote:

> Having a child, no matter at what age, changes the status of a woman in all classes of Indian society, including upper-class Bengal. Becoming a mother, in fact, is not so much a change of status as it is the attainment of the status a woman is born to achieve.... Now she is important in her own standing; she has gone through her times of adjustment, disillusionment, and illusion. She has served and obeyed the elders; it's now her turn to be listened to and respected by all, including the men in the house (Roy 1975: 125-126).

Extended families are often dominated by a male. Women are expected to abide by the judgments of men and in most cases to be subservient to their wishes. Generally, a woman is expected to sacrifice her personal desires and needs if they conflict with the overall goals of the family.

Of course, nuclear families have disadvantages too. One problem which the disappearance of the female hierarchy creates for women in the nuclear family is that domestic work becomes the major responsibility of the sole adult woman in the household. In India, women who can afford it solve this problem by employing a servant to do some or all of the domestic work.

From this literature on Indian women it can be seen that the social and domestic lives of educated employed women in India are in flux. It was once considered degrading for a middle-class or upper-class woman to pursue employment. She was looked down upon for doing so, even when the decision was motivated by economic necessity. Now middle and upper-class women have more freedom and opportunity for education, and can enter a range of occupations and professions. Greater respect is now accorded to the occupational or professional achievements of employed women.

Employment, Fertility Attitudes and Status of Women in India

Another important area where considerable changes have taken place is that of fertility. With regard to the influence of women's labour force participation, comparative analysis of World Fertility Survey data reveals that the association between women's labour force participation and fertility depends upon the level of economic development of the country (Cleland and Scott 1987; Hugo 1992). In the less developed countries there is no consistent difference in fertility between groups of women according to work status. In more advanced developing countries, however, there is a negative relationship between women's labour force participation and fertility. In these countries employed women have significantly lower levels of fertility than non-employed women (McIntosh 1983; Pleck and Hollingsworth 1996).

In a developing country like India, the major factor besides education and employment contributing to changes in the family lives of employed women is family planning. With increasing numbers of women taking up paid jobs the concept of woman as a 'child bearing machine', and the birth of a child as a gift from God, has disappeared from a large segment of the educated population. The right of women to decide the number of children they should bear is gaining greater recognition.

Further, Vig (1989), in a discussion of employment and changing family lives, establishes a correlation between the social status of women and fertility: the higher the status of women, the lower their fertility, and vice versa. Hence, the social status of women is an important factor in the reduction of fertility.

Writing on status and fertility behaviour, several authors claim that there is now scope for women to use their talents in ways other than childbearing (Curtin 1982; Cain 1984; Gopalan 1989; Sarup and Sulabha 1990; Gulati 1996). Most women today are aware that if they are not involved in the strain of frequent pregnancies and child rearing they can pursue other opportunities. In order to contribute to the welfare of the family and community, a woman needs good health and time to engage in activities other than looking after children. With the employment of women, both husband and wife are more likely to accept the small family norm (Reddy 1986; Basu 1991; 1992).

In this project I examine whether access to an independent income is a factor helping a woman to make decisions about the number of children she should have. Since I am primarily interested in identifying gender equality within the family with regard to the domestic division of labour and decision-making in household matters I shall not discuss in detail the attitude of women towards fertility. However, fertility is an important issue in decision-making within the family and cannot be ignored.

In India, the employment of women exposes them to a wider range of ideas, opinions, and behaviour patterns. It limits the time women devote to their families and provides an effective alternative to large families. Hence, women's occupational status will have an influence on their fertility. Both education and employment exert powerful causal influences upon fertility in India. There are several studies to support this view (Basu 1993). The fertility of women who work outside the home is considerably lower than that of women who do not work or are employed solely within the home. Karkal and Pandey (1989) have

observed that fertility rates were highest among women who never attended school and lowest among those with ten or more years of education. Pandit and Coubey (1986) conclude from their survey of rural fertility rates in India that literacy is the most influential factor for bringing about a change in demographic behaviour.

Family planning programs are more effective when women are employed and educated. Most research in India on the relationship between education, female employment and contraceptive use clearly indicates that women who work and are better educated use contraceptives more frequently and more effectively. Vardarajan's (1981) investigation of the education-fertility nexus in the Kota districts of Tamil Nadu, Gotpagar and Narain's research (1983) into fertility differentials between migrant and non-migrant workers in Bombay, and Reddy's (1983) analysis of caste-related family planning attitudes consistently identify education as a powerful determinant of Indian fertility.

Another potential mechanism through which employment can affect family size is the pattern of familial decision-making. Women with greater economic power are more likely to exercise influence in familial decision-making and to avoid exceeding their own family size desires. Employed women may participate more equally with their husbands in deciding family matters. They may also view family planning more positively. Many such couples initiate family planning early in their child bearing history, resulting in lower fertility. Nelson (1979) wrote:

> Educational level of women is strongly correlated with fertility behaviour. Education raises the age of marriage, and increases the chance that

> women will gain employment outside the home and...employed women will have less time to spend raising children (Das Gupta 1975 cited in Nelson 1979:48).

Bhatia (1989) suggests that policy planners should pay close attention to the fact that once employed, women may gain a sense of economic and social security and have greater access to contraceptives, and they will start to limit their family size.

Employment and Division of Labour within the Family in India

A considerable amount of research has been devoted to the effect of employment on the domestic division of labour in Western countries (Juster and Vinovskis 1987; Coverman and Sheley 1986; Warde and Hetherington 1993; Lennon and Rosenfield 1994; Sanchez 1994; Greenstein 1996; DeMaris and Longmore 1996).

Some studies conclude that there has been only minor change in the behaviour patterns of husbands with employed wives (Baxter 1993; Bittman 1990; Gershuny and Brice 1994; Goodnow and Bowes 1994; Bittman and Pixley 1997). They spend only a little more time on household tasks than the husbands of full-time housewives (Pleck 1985a; 1985b; Juster and Vinovskis 1987; Record and Marjorie 1990; Baxter 1993; Ironmonger 1994; Laurie and Rose 1994).

There is much speculation in the Indian literature about the consequences of the economic participation of women on the domestic division of labour. Some have argued that women's work has a positive influence because it increases family income and gives women a greater say in the organisation of family

activities (Butalia 1985; Krishnaraj 1987; Chaurasia 1994; Gajalakshmi 1998). Others have stressed the negative consequences of women's economic participation, focusing on the increased burdens of women in employment and the neglect of children (Arputhamurty 1990; A. Kumar 1993; Rao 1994; Sircar 1994). They argue that employment is not necessarily followed by a readjustment of the division of labour with husbands or other members of the households. Standing (1991), who conducted a study on lower middle-class employed Bengali women in Calcutta, points out:

> Male participation in domestic work is largely casual or sporadic. The exception is marketing which, as a consequence of the historical legacy of the 'inside-outside' division between male and female spheres of activity, has remained a strongly male task (Standing 1991:75).

For example, it is argued that it is often older children who share their mother's burden (Swaminathan 1990). There is, however, little empirical evidence to support either of the views conclusively. Most studies of Indian employed women, however, have examined the division of labour and housework in a different context: role conflict and the exhaustion experienced by employed wives (Khanna and Verghese 1978; U Sharma 1986a; 1986b; Debi 1988; Singh 1996). These studies use qualitative data to show that employed wives receive negligible help from their husbands. However, there are several limitations to these studies. First, the sample sizes are small. Second, there has been no comparison made between the life patterns of employed and non-employed women. Third, studies on Indian women and their families have been primarily problem-oriented. Few studies have been conducted where both quantitative and

qualitative analysis are used to analyse the results. There has been little emphasis on comparative analysis.

Employment and Decision-Making Within the Family in India

In India the status of women as well as of men is largely determined by the amount of resources at their command (Patel 1989). Because the role played by women is devalued, they do not have equal access to resources such as education and paid employment. Indian women lack not only command over resources but also control over decision-making within the family. Their low involvement in decision-making confers power and authority on men. One of the important reasons for women's lack of status is the lack of control over their own income and family decisions. According to some research, many employed middle-class women find themselves not much better off than housewives when it comes to effective authority over family income (Sen 1989).

Men have a major say in deciding household affairs, sometimes even in personal matters affecting females (Devendra 1980; Sinha 1993; Kumar 1994). Especially in lower-class families, the husbands have absolute authority (sanctioned and sustained by social norms) to decide whether women can enter paid employment.

Most studies on patterns of decision-making in Indian families are limited in scope. A systematic analysis of patterns of decision-making in Indian families is yet to be undertaken. The few studies that have focused on this issue report contradictory results (Khanna and Verghese 1978; L. Devi 1982; Ramu 1989; Das and Gupta 1995; Jha and Pujari 1996).

Khanna and Verghese (1978) found that the role of employed wives' in decision-making was almost the same as that of non-employed wives. By contrast, L. Devi (1982) found that the husband's power in decision-making in dual-earner families was significantly lower than that of his counterpart in single earner households. Ramu (1989) suggested that wives were increasingly, but informally, appropriating authority from their husbands to make decisions.

The main measure for assessing the distribution of power is that used by Sen Chaudhuri (1995), who defines the distribution of conjugal power as the capacity to make decisions in different areas of family life. Mishra (1993) argues that an employed woman who makes a significant contribution to family income also feels that she should have a share in decision-making. Such women participate directly in making decisions regarding marriage, education, occupation and political affiliations. They freely exchange their views, and discuss problems that may otherwise lead to family disintegration.

Mishra (1993) also points out that employed women tend to make decisions not only about household finances, children's education and domestic matters but also about children's mate selection, the fixing of dowry and future plans for the family's welfare. She claims that years of work experience enhance the decision-making power of the employed wife, as does length of marriage. Thus, research suggests that a woman's status in the family is related to whether or not she is engaged in paid economic activity.

Decision-making in the family is crucial to the relative status of family members because it involves the exercise of power. The degree of power a woman possesses may be measured in terms of her personal autonomy and

equality. Thus, one of the key questions I hope to answer in this study is whether economic participation of women brings about gender equality within their families in terms of decision-making. What little work has been done in this area does not yet provide a full description of decision-making patterns. Is domestic power and outside economic activity related? If an employed woman contributes earnings, does she gain authority in family decision-making and if so, to what extent?

My study examines whether the employment of middle-class Bengali women enhances their role within the family. Further, I examine whether the husband's power in decision-making in dual-earner families differs from that of his counterpart in single-earner households. I also examine whether dual-earner couples are more egalitarian in making decisions on important issues concerning the family and whether women have greater authority in decision-making.

Emerging Issues

Much of the research on women in India emphasises the idea that education and employment are important factors producing change in women's family lives because they weaken the traditional roles which confine women to a narrow range of options. A problem in this literature on employed women in India, however, is that it attempts to make generalised findings at an all-India level without taking into account regional and ethnic differences affecting the lives of women. As a result, many accounts give only a partial view of the changing family lives of employed women in India.

Most studies on employed women in India have largely ignored the family lives of middle-class educated women who are not employed. Do they have comparable autonomy and power in decision-making to their employed counterparts, even though they do not have access to an independent income? Does a more segregated division of labour characterise such households? Some previous studies on families in urban areas do make special mention of women but primarily in their roles as wives and mothers, not as workers.

Conclusion

Three structural conditions have combined to bring about change in the status of women in India. First, constitutional and legal policies following independence have, at least at a formal level, inaugurated a new chapter in the history of the struggle for improving the status of Indian women. The constitution of free India proclaimed the equal status of women with men in every respect. A wide range of social reformers became the harbingers of improvement in the status of women, promoting a new value system that recognised women in their own right. The national movement for Independence has been an important force for change in the status of women in India.

Secondly, apart from constitutional amendments and legal policies and reform of social customs, another force for improvement in the status of women has been education. Thirdly, paid employment has played a part both directly and indirectly in the evolution of women's status and changes in their family lives to a certain extent.

Such changes in the status of women have been greatest in the urban areas of Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi, and Madras where women are exposed to a high degree of technological development, better transport and communication, and greater access to centres of technical and higher learning and to economic and political activities. In the rural areas the problems faced by women remain largely unchanged (Mahajan 1989; Devasia and Devasia 1990; Patel 1992; Manuja 1997). One reason why legal changes have been ineffective is that many rural women consider it improper to seek legal redress when their rights are violated (U. Sharma 1986a; Pawar 1996; Varma 1997).

However, the changing economic lives of women in India reflect the fact that in theory there is now no legal barrier to women occupying any post in the public service which formerly only men could occupy. Constitutionally and legally, no barriers prevent women gaining equality with men (Patel 1992; Chaudhuri 1993; K. Sharma 1994).

CHAPTER 3

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

This chapter describes the social environment of the study area. It provides some background to changes in the family lives and employment of middle-class employed Bengali women in Calcutta. First, I examine the historical development of Calcutta. Second, I look at the nature of urban growth, employment, and education in India generally and, in particular, in West Bengal and its capital, Calcutta. Third, I provide a brief description of the Bengali community and its culture and traditions.

Calcutta

Migrants to Calcutta have come from diverse economic and cultural backgrounds, bringing with them distinctive skills and specialisations. Unskilled labour, initially in industry and later in the public sector, was drawn largely from Hindi-speaking states but also from Orissa, bordering West Bengal to the south. Calcutta, one of India's largest cities, is where colonial institutions and Western ideas made an early impression. Education, income and occupation appear to have become more important than caste, especially among elite members of the middle caste (Chatterjee 1995; Martin 1997).

> The great movement of Bengalis from rural Bengal into Calcutta from the late nineteenth century was a movement particularly of middle-class and

> landed elites into opportunities created by the expansion of the imperial administration and into education in the newly opened schools and colleges. Leaving their families on their rural estates in the early years, this group gradually brought their dependents to Calcutta, creating a settled bourgeoisie and petit bourgeoisie in the city (McGuire 1983 cited in Standing 1991:20).

The rapid spread of English education during the nineteenth century was largely due to the *bhadralok*[1], who realised that through English education they could enter clean, respectable occupations in Calcutta (McGuire 1983; Mitra 1992). Martin (1997) writes:

> Calcutta is 'home' to people drawn from all over India and is perhaps the most cosmopolitan of all the major Indian cities. While Bengali culture existed long before Job Charnock set foot in Calcutta, the Bengalis as natives of the region have never asserted to the full their potential to dominate all facets of society. Eighty percent of all the people speak Bengali. Bengalis dominate in the arts, poetry and literature, and in education. Real (industrial) power however, resides in the hands of other Indians who were first attracted to Calcutta by burgeoning business opportunities from the early days of the British rule, and who have remained on and grown (Martin 1997:46).

The Calcutta Metropolitan District has a population of more than 9 million (Standing 1991). This figure is about 7 per cent of the total population of West Bengal, which is 68,077,965 million or about 8 per cent of the country's population of 846.3 million at the time of the 1991 census (Grover and Arora 1997). According to the UN, in 1995 India's estimated population was 931.44 million (United Nations 1995). Calcutta is the second most populous city of India after Bombay. Standing writes:

[1] Literally, respectable people.

> The city of Calcutta itself the central area administered by the Calcutta Corporation ... has a population of over three million. Calcutta's population is swollen by seasonal migrant labour from the villages of West Bengal after the harvesting season; and by day, thousands of commuters pour into the city's two main railway stations on their way to offices or to hawk produce on the city's streets (Standing 1991:19).

Calcutta was the major British trading centre for eastern India and the political capital of India until 1912.[2] As such it attracted all the modern urban activities such as export and import trade, finance, political administration and industry. Calcutta is still the major urban centre of a vast region including rural West Bengal, Bihar to the north-west, Orissa to the south-west, Assam and the neighbouring hill states to the north-east, and the eastern states beyond present day Bangladesh.[3]

As the only major city in eastern India, Calcutta has traditionally acted as a magnet, drawing labour not only from other districts of West Bengal but also from surrounding states. There have been major influxes of refugees displaced from East Bengal at partition in 1947 and in subsequent years, as well as some inflow after the 1971 war, which created independent Bangladesh out of the former eastern wing of Pakistan. Calcutta has acted as a source of employment and sanctuary for many kinds of migrants (Rachine 1990; Chaudhuri 1990, Losty 1990; Mukherjee 1991). The early demand for factory labour drew migrants, mostly males, first from the surrounding rural areas and later from the other

[2] In 1912, the seat of the government of India was transferred from Calcutta to Delhi.

[3] A peculiarity of Calcutta's regional location is that, unlike Delhi and even Bombay, Calcutta is not located near another major urban centre. The other cities in the eastern region of India outside of Calcutta are all provincial centres with small populations and a limited range of economic activities and employment opportunities.

eastern provinces. Calcutta has been, historically, a city of single male migrants who generally retained some base in the rural areas and who, at least in the early stages of industralisation, rarely brought families to the city (Siddiquie 1982, Haan 1994).

Selected Characteristics of the Indian Population[4]

The current study is concerned with urban women. Because urbanisation has an effect on the family lives of women, it is important to look at the pattern of urban growth in India. Table 3.1 shows that the urban population for Indian males has increased from 26.0 per cent in 1986 to 26.2 per cent in 1991 and for females from 24.7 per cent in 1986 to 25.2 per cent in 1991.

Table 3.1 Percentage of Population in Urban Areas of India 1985-1991

Year	Both sexes Urban	Male Urban	Female Urban
1985	25.0	-----	-----
1986	25.4	26.0	24.7
1987	25.8	26.5	25.1
1988	26.3	26.9	25.6
1989	26.7	27.4	26.0
1990	27.2	-----	-----
1991	25.7	26.2	25.2

Source: United Nations, 1991.

[4] The data reported in this chapter are based totally on census data. The census is conducted in India every 10 years. In a huge, diverse country like India even conducting a census every 10 years is a massive task. Because of restricted computer facilities the process of tabulating and printing census data is very slow, and it takes up to 10 years for data to be made available for further analysis. In this chapter wherever available I have used the latest census figures (1991). Where 1991 census data are not available, I refer to 1981 data.

Density of Population in India, West Bengal and Calcutta

In order to have a clear picture of the city where this study was conducted, it is important to understand population density in Calcutta, in relation to the overall density of population in India. Calcutta is one of the most populous cities in India. The density of the population affects the day-to-day life of the people. Because of the tremendous growth in the population of Calcutta, problems like lack of housing and unemployment are increasing.[5]

Table 3.2 Density of Population in India, West Bengal and Calcutta

Place	Year 1981	Year 1991
India	216	267
West Bengal	615	766
Calcutta	22,260	23,670

Source: Population of India 1991 Government of India 1991.

If we disregard small States and Union Territories such as Delhi (6,319), Chandigarh (5,620), Lakshadweep (1,615),[6] Pondicherry (1,605) and Daman and Diu (906), the density of West Bengal is the highest in India. Between 1981 and 1991 the overall density of population in India rose by 24 per cent (from 216 to 267); in West Bengal the increase was 25 per cent (615 to 766). Even though the rate of increase in Calcutta proper was lower (only 6 per cent), population density is extremely high in Calcutta: 22,260 persons per square kilometre in 1981 and 23,670 in 1991.

[5] The density of population is defined for the purpose of the Indian Census as the number of persons per square kilometre.

[6] The numbers in the bracket is the density of each union territory.

In summary, the population residing in the Calcutta municipal corporation is very dense. However, in this more educated population there are more chances of finding government offices employing women.

Sex Ratio in India, West Bengal and Calcutta

In any study the population structure of the area where the research is conducted is important because it helps to understand the nature of the sample which is selected from this broader demographic structure. It is also a crucial variable as it affects the daily life patterns of people living in that area. For example, the sex composition of the population is affected by differentials in mortality among males and females, selective migration and the sex ratio at birth. 'India is one of the very few countries in which female life expectancy at birth (and at all ages below 40) is lower than that of males' (Standing 1991:9).[7] Thus perhaps one of the most important trends to emerge from the census figures is that in India women constitute a numerical minority of the population.[8]

Various explanations have been offered for such patterns. Some deny the validity of the figures, arguing that women tend to be under-represented in the census returns, which are usually made by males. Other explanations accept the sexual imbalance and seek to find reasons for its existence. According to some it

[7] In a recent overview of demographic trends in India, however, Dyson (1987) suggests that since the 1970s female death rates have improved overall at a faster rate than those of males. Disaggregated data are needed in order to know whether this indicates a general improvement or a greater degree of differentiation within the female population (Dyson 1987 cited in Standing 1991:175).

[8] For further discussion of women and demography in India see Mitra 1976; Khan and Prasad 1982.

is a result of female infanticide, which is practised among different communities in India. Of the several reasons advanced for this practice is the prevalence of the dowry system in India. As a result parents consider their daughters as economic liabilities rather than as social assets.[9]

It is also said that women are subject to high risks associated with childbirth and that maternal mortality rates are high. Another explanation is that female children are often neglected; they are not as well fed and do not receive as much medical attention as their brothers, and therefore fewer survive the early stages of life (Joseph 1997). Furthermore, it appears that the male rate of survival has improved considerably over the last several decades, while that of females has remained static, thus widening the gap (A. Basu 1991). It is also argued that women suffer from neglect throughout their lives in many parts of India, particularly as a result of the widely observed custom of sequential feeding. Women, who have usually processed, cooked and (in many rural areas) also helped to grow and harvest the food, eat after men, and sometimes after the children, so that they get only whatever is left over (Nelson 1979; Joseph 1997).

Sex composition constitutes a basic demographic characteristic of the population.[10] Overall the sex ratio in India went down whereas in West Bengal the sex ratio went up slightly from 1981 to 1991. The sex ratio of West Bengal has always been below the sex ratio of India as a whole and is still lagging behind the overall Indian figure.

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[9] For a detailed discussion on female infanticide see Chapter 6.

[10] It is measured as the number of females per 1,000 males in the population.

The history of male migration has always been reflected in the sex ratio of Calcutta's population. In 1921, the ratio for the municipal area was 487 females to 1000 males (Government of India 1921; Government of India 1923). The recent census figures show a ratio of 712:1000 (Government of India 1981; Government of India 1983), giving Calcutta the lowest ratio of females to males of any major Indian city. The city of Calcutta is characterised by an excess of males. The rate of migration into Calcutta has, however, been falling since 1951, and particularly since 1961, reflecting the saturation of employment and the scarcity of living space in this extremely populous city. It is likely that the sex ratio will gradually equalise.

Table 3.3 Sex Ratio of India, West Bengal and Calcutta

Place	Year 1981	Year 1991
India	934	929
West Bengal	911	917
Calcutta	741	797

Source: Population of India 1991; Government of India, 1991.

Table 3.3 shows that the sex ratio in Calcutta is very low. Studies on Calcutta show that the most important reason for this is that in migration from the rural to the urban areas women (and children) are likely to move with men only if there is a greater possibility of becoming economically productive after the move. Otherwise they prefer to remain in the rural areas (their places of origin) because the cost of living is higher in the urban areas and families have difficulties in managing with the income of just one earning member (Sinha 1978; Mitra 1990).

The sex ratio in Calcutta increased from 1981 to 1991, mainly because of the increase in the literacy of women. There is a higher school enrolment and a decrease in primary and secondary school wastage. With educational attainment, there is an increase in the proportion of women entering paid jobs. Once they are in the organised sectors, it is more likely that they will be reported in the census data. This improvement in the sex ratio suggests that there have been some changes in the life patterns of women (especially employed women).

Literacy Rate in India, West Bengal and Calcutta

In India there are enormous disparities in the education of males and females. A higher percentage of males than females attend primary school (77 per cent compared with only 62 per cent of girls). At the secondary level the disparity is even greater, with only 11 per cent of females in school, compared with almost one-third of males (Premi 1991a; 1991b).

In the Indian context literacy is very important. Since independence the government of India has been making an effort to provide education to all and to remove illiteracy. It has introduced several educational programs. 'Dealing with Education for Equality', the National Policy Document on Education (1986), places a special emphasis on the removal of disparities and an equalisation of educational opportunities by attending to the specific needs of those suffering disadvantages. All sections of the population have gained as a result of this expansion of the educational system.

In theory women are important beneficiaries of economic growth and educational expansion in post-Independent India. The removal of women's

illiteracy and obstacles inhibiting their access to, and retention in, elementary education has received priority, through the provision of special support services, the setting of time targets, and effective monitoring. For the purpose of the census, any person who can both read and write in any language is considered literate. As mentioned earlier, education is highly valued among Bengalis. In West Bengal, of the total population of 67,982,732 persons, 35,461,898 males and 32,520,834 females are literate. The disparity between male and female literacy is not as great as in the rest of the population.[11]

Table 3.4 Literacy Rate in India, West Bengal and Calcutta [a]

India				West Bengal				Calcutta			
year	P	M	F	year	P	M	F	year	P	M	F
1981	41.4	53.5	28.5	1981	48.6	59.9	36.1	1981	65.5	70.9	58.6
1991	52.1	63.9	39.4	1991	57.7	67.2	47.2	1991	70.1	75.2	65.1

Notes: P refers to persons and M and F to males and females.
a All figures are percentages.
i) The 1981 literacy rates for India exclude Assam where the 1981 Census could not be conducted. The 1991 literacy rates for India exclude Jammu and Kashmir where the 1991 Census was yet to be conducted.
ii) The rates for the years 1981 and 1991 relate to population aged 7 and above.
iii) According to the Census definition in India literacy means ability to both read and write. Only the ability to read is not enough to qualify as a literate.
Sources: Population of India 1991; Government of India, 1981; Government of India,1991.

Table 3.4 shows that the overall effective literacy rate for India as a whole has increased. Over the same period male literacy increased from 53.5 per cent to 63.9 per cent, and for females from 28.5 per cent to 39.4 per cent. Similar patterns are evident in West Bengal and Calcutta. Although the performance of West Bengal in improving literacy rates compares unfavourably with that of

[11] Census of India: Historical and World Perspective 1991:49.

states like Kerala, Mizoram, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat, as well as a number of smaller states and Union Territories, the literacy rate among females has progressively improved.

Thus, Table 3.4 shows that there has been a significant improvement in the female literacy rate in India as well as in the state of West Bengal and Calcutta in recent years. As noted in previous chapters, there is a link between literacy and employment. The more educated a woman is, the more likely it is that she will find employment.

The figures in Table 3.4 imply that, with female literacy increasing to 65.1 per cent in 1991, the chances of women being in white-collar employment have also increased. Improved literacy among females in West Bengal and, especially, Calcutta is important to this study because women's education has an effect in shaping opinion and behaviour in their families.

The Working Population in India

In this study I examine the effect of paid employment on gender equality within families of employed women in Calcutta. In order to do so it is essential to have a clear picture of the employed population in India and West Bengal and the pattern of female participation in paid employment.[12]

A weakness of censuses is that economically non-productive persons are categorised as non-workers. However, this is misleading because non-employed

[12] However, measurement of women's work in developing countries continues to pose problems for policy makers, data collectors and researchers. India is no exception. Censuses and surveys tend to underestimate female participation in the labour force. Within the same country different data sources may give different estimates of women's work participation.

women who are full-time housewives are workers too, even though they are not paid. There is a bias in the census definition of household work (largely done by women), which is included in the category of non-workers. In the rural areas especially, women are engaged in working on the family farm or fields, which should be considered as economically productive work.

Table 3.5 Working Population of India [a]

Total population 1981		Main workers 1981 [b]	Percentage of main workers to total population	
			1971	1981
Persons	658,140,676	220,082,531	33.1	33.4
Males	339,895,757	174,115,384	52.6	51.2
Females	318,244,919	45,967,174	12.1	14.4

a In Tables 3.5 and 3.6 the term 'working population' excludes those people engaged in full-time unpaid housework, full-time students, retired persons not employed again, all dependents such as infants, children and disabled, inmates of penal and mental institutions, people unemployed but seeking work, and lastly beggars (India, Registrar General 1983:140).
b The term 'main workers' includes paid workers employed as cultivators, agricultural labourers, in the household industry.
Source: Government of India 1981, Paper 3.

Table 3.6 Working Population of West Bengal

Total population 1981		Main workers 1981	Percentage of main workers to total population	
			1971	1981
Persons	54,485,560	15,509,621	27.9	28.5
Males	28,505,151	13,958,962	48.8	49.0
Females	25,980,409	1,550,659	4.4	6.0

Source: Government of India 1981, Paper 3.

Tables 3.5 and 3.6 show that the total workforce participation rate in 1981 has risen slightly since 1971. The female workforce participation rate has increased in West Bengal from 4.4 per cent in 1971 to 6.0 per cent in 1981, which is still very low when compared to Nagaland, which has the highest percentage of female employment (45.25 per cent in 1971 and 40.83 per cent in 1981).[13]

The tables also indicate that there has been a marginal increase in the percentage of women reported as main workers in the last 25 years. Research shows that there has been an increase in the proportion of middle-class women in white-collar occupations like doctors, teachers, office workers, and nurses (Gupta 1976; Anant 1986; Gutek 1986b; National Sample Survey Organisation 1990; Agarwal 1994; Nandal 1996).

The percentage of urban women in the workforce is given by Raju (1993): 'The latest figures available for India come from the 1991 census, which records only 9.74 per cent of urban females to be in the workforce. However, this shows an increase of 1.43 per cent over the 1981 figures' (Raju 1993:17 cited in Raju and Bagchi 1993).

Distribution of Main Workers in India, West Bengal and Calcutta

As this study is based on female 'main workers' in an urban area (Calcutta) it is important to describe the nature of any increase in the percentage of 'main workers' in the urban areas. Table 3.7 shows that the proportion of 'main workers' in household industry in overall India is 4.0 per cent and that

[13] It may be noted here that majority of the female workers in Nagaland work in the fields.

West Bengal (4.2 per cent) has a proportion in this sector of workers very slightly higher than the overall Indian average.

Table 3.7 is important, especially the data on Calcutta, as it gives a picture of the total universe from which the sample for this study was selected. The area of my study, urban women employed in white-collar jobs, was selected from this group of 'other workers' in Calcutta.

Table 3.7 Percentage of Main Workers in India, West Bengal and Calcutta by Broad Categories 1981

	Cultivators	Agricultural labourers	Household industry	Other workers [a]	Total
India					
Persons	41.5	25.2	4.0	29.3	100
Males	43.8	19.8	3.6	32.8	100
Females	32.0	34.0	2.2	31.8	100
West Bengal					
Persons	30.6	24.8	4.2	40.4	100
Males	32.4	23.3	3.7	40.6	100
Females	14.8	38.3	8.2	38.7	100
Calcutta					
Persons	0.3	0.3	2.6	96.8	100
Males	0.2	0.3	2.5	97.0	100
Females	0.6	0.2	3.2	96.0	100

a The term 'other workers' means all workers who have been engaged in some economic activity during the last year, but are not agricultural labourers or in household industries. Thus, the workers who fall within this category include public servants, teachers and priests. those in trade and commerce, business and transport, politics and social work. Workers in white-collar and blue-collar jobs other than cultivators, agriculturists and workers in the household industry are also included in this group (India, Registrar General 1983:140).
Source: Government of India 1981, Paper 3.

However, Calcutta, being more or less an urban area, has only 2.6 per cent in household industry. The proportion of 'main workers' in India classified as 'other workers' is 29.3 per cent. West Bengal (40.4 per cent) has a proportion higher than the overall average in India. In Calcutta it is as high as 96.8 per cent.

Mean Age of Females at Marriage in India and West Bengal (1971 and 1981)

Age at marriage is an important indicator of changes in the domestic lives of women. This is particularly the case in India where the marital status of a woman determines her decision-making power within the family (Blumberg and Dwaraki 1980; Reddy 1986; Debi 1988; Sud 1991). Studies show that education and employment have an effect on the age at marriage of employed women. Modern educated women are not in favour of early marriages. Women in professional and white-collar occupations enter wage work primarily because they are strongly committed to personal economic independence or have come from backgrounds which encourage girls not only to be educated but also to take up employment (Majumdar and Das 1971; Hussain et al. 1984; Gutek 1986a; Mishra 1993; Nayar 1997). The study by Murikan (1975) shows that:

> An increase in the age at marriage of women is another remarkable change due to their employment. Even in the case of arranged marriages unemployed women are settled earlier by their parents, but when they are employed parents become more selective and this tends to postpone marriage (Murikan 1975:83).

In research on employed women it is usually assumed that the higher the age at marriage of the women, the greater is the extent of the egalitarian marital

power structure in the family (Chanana 1988; Das and Gupta 1995). This is one of the important research questions I will examine.

Age at marriage is relevant to my work because it is assumed that the marital status of the employed woman increases her power to make decisions within the family. Age at marriage is also important for her fertility and her decision about how many children to have. As 1991 census data were not available on this topic I report 1981 data. For the purpose of comparison, I also use 1971 data.

Table 3.8 Mean Age of Females at Marriage of those Married up to the Age of 35 in India and West Bengal 1971 and 1981

Rural areas		Urban areas		Combined	
India					
1971	1981	1971	1981	1971	1981
16.7	17.8	19.2	20.1	17.2	18.4
W. Bengal					
16.8	18.5	20.5	21.5	17.8	19.3

Source: Census Synthetic Cohorts 1971 and 1981

Sharp rural-urban differentials in marriage patterns are clearly visible in India. Age at marriage has increased by 1 year in both rural and urban areas. Table 3.8 shows that the mean age of females at marriage in rural areas of India was 16.7 in 1971, increasing to 17.8 in 1981. In the urban areas of India the mean age of females in 1971 was 19.2, and by 1981 it had increased to 20.1.[14] The

[14] However, even in the urban areas only 9 per cent remain unmarried after this age (Banerjee 1992).

main point is that mean age of marriage in urban areas of West Bengal is higher than in India as a whole.

Since India is full of cultural complexities, contradictions and regional variations, what may be true for some regions in India may not necessarily be true for urban West Bengal. In urban India also, the changes in attitudes of the people of various sections of society may be different. This study is confined to middle-class Bengali women in Calcutta. Research on Bengali women shows that with the changing socio-economic conditions in India women started taking up education in increasing numbers and eventually moved into salaried jobs and professions. Thus, they are exposed to changing beliefs and values which have an effect on their age at marriage. Statistical data and census data show that various social factors such as level of education, occupation, religion, and class play an important role in determining the age at marriage of females in the Bengali community.

Level of education is important in determining the age at marriage in India. Considerable statistical data are now available which show that age at marriage has risen sharply with the increase in the level of education. As Table 3.9 shows, women with a matriculation certificate tend to marry 3 to 4 years later than illiterate women both in urban and rural areas because education takes time to be completed and delays the age at marriage.

Table 3. 9 Mean Age at Marriage of Currently Married Women by Level of Education in Rural and Urban Areas of India-1981.

Level of education	Rural areas	Urban areas
Illiterate	16.5	16.7
Literate but below primary	17.4	17.5
Primary but below class 10	17.7	17.9
Below graduate	19.0	19.4

Source: Government of India, Occasional Paper No 2 of 1988

Education, Employment and Rate of Fertility in India

Studies conducted in various parts of India have established an approximate though not consistent relationship between education, employment, age at marriage and completed family size. Studies on the birth rate in India indicate that when marriage is delayed in order to complete education, there is a reduction in the birth rate (Debi 1988; Ramu 1989; Raina 1990; Basu 1992).[15]

Education is known to provide high motivation for birth control. Education generates new social expectations and new cultural ideals, which are intervening variables affecting fertility. It is hypothesised that education is one of the key factors which makes women conscious of the usefulness of family planning methods. Educational attainments have a direct relationship to the

[15] In the Indian census, the fertility rate is measured indirectly by the child-women ratio (CWR). The CWR is the number of children per 1,000 women of child bearing age. This rate is obtained by dividing the total number of children under 10 years of age by the number of women in the age group of 15-49 years.

practice of family planning.

Table 3.10 Fertility Rate in India-and West Bengal 1971-1981

	General marital fertility rate [a]		Total marital fertility rate [b]	
India	1971	1981	1971	1981
Rural	177	144	5.5	4.5
Urban	154	123	4.5	3.8
W. Beng				
Rural	212	150	7.0	4.6
Urban	122	89	3.9	3.0

Source: Government of India 1981, Occasional Paper No13 of 1988.
a. The number of children have been born alive during the last year per 1000 married women of child bearing ages. In the 1981 tabulation, the age group 15-49...have been considered as child bearing ages (Government of India 1981, Occasional Paper No 13 of 1988:3). Further Total Marital Fertility
b. Total number of children that would have born alive per married women had the current schedule of age specific marital fertility rate been applicable for the entire reproductive period, 15-49. It is calculated as the sum of age specific marital fertility rates in five year age groups multiplied by 5 (Government of India 1981, Occasional Paper No 13 of 1988:3).[16]

From Table 3.10 we can see that the general marital fertility rate for rural India decreased from 177 in 1971 to 144 in 1981. In urban India the decline was from 154 in 1971 to 123 in 1981. The table also shows that there has been a decline in the rate of fertility in West Bengal. In the urban areas the general marital fertility rate of 122 in 1971 decreased to 89 in 1981.

Presumably the spread of education and employment has facilitated a reduction in the fertility rate in both rural and urban areas. Employed women are

[16] The Census identifies some problems with these definitions. In the census the question on births during the last year was applicable only for currently married women as it was a sensitive question for divorced, widowed or single women. Babies who may have been born during the last year to these categories of women or women who died soon after giving birth were not taken into account.

more likely to marry late, postpone childbearing, use family planning methods and seek prenatal care when pregnant. In this study I examine whether employment gives a woman greater autonomy to decide when to have children, and how many to have.

Structure of Households in Calcutta

There are sharp differences in household organisation between rural and urban areas in West Bengal which affect the domestic lives of women, both employed and non-employed. It is important to understand the composition of urban households in metropolitan areas because the economic and housing conditions in which families live in metropolitan areas is bound to affect gender equality within them.

In this project I study the kind of household urban women prefer to live in. Single-member households account for only one-fifth of the total households in Calcutta. From the census reports of other metropolitan cities like Madras, Bombay and Delhi, we find the percentages of single-member households vary by only 11-16 per cent. According to the UN, the average household size in India in 1990 was 5.5 persons (United Nations 1995).

The Bengalis of Calcutta

Education has been prized in Bengal more highly than in other parts of India. Calcutta University has long been described as the world's largest degree-granting University. Calcutta has always been better provided with intellectual facilities than anywhere else in the country (Standing 1991; Martin 1997).

The middle class in India comprise people belonging to the upper three castes, that is the Brahmins (the priestly caste), the Kshatriyas (the warrior caste),[17] and the Vaishyas (the business caste) (Inden 1972; S. Sharma 1980; Rachine 1990). It excludes a fourth caste, the Shudras (the commoners). This picture holds for the rest of India but not for West Bengal, where the caste system is significantly different. According to Standing (1991),

> Both the caste composition of Hindu Bengal and the role of caste in Bengali society have shown marked historical differences from other parts of India. In particular, distinctive patterns of social mobility, the absence of Kshatriya (warrior) division of castes and a comparatively weak stress on untouchability and pollution have been considered by scholars to be the hallmarks of caste structure in Bengal (Bhowmick 1969 cited in Standing 1991:38).

The principal subjects of my study are Bengali women belonging to the middle class. In India, the caste system has survived for 2,000 years. In every segment of Indian society, including Bengali society, the caste system had a strong effect on women and their lives in the past. It determined the class to which they belonged, the education they received, and the nature of the occupation in which they could be engaged. In India caste and class were inter linked.[18] The middle-class women who form the main subjects of this study generally belong to the upper three castes.

Employment may also be related to the caste one belongs to. According to Standing (1991):

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[17] Note that a sub-division of the Kshatriya caste (called the Kayasthas) are present in West Bengal.

[18] Now stereotypical generalisations cannot be made. A women belonging to a low caste can change her class by being educated and taking up white-collar employment.

> Although caste ceased to be a reliable indicator of occupation early in the century it has partly shaped the occupational contours of its members. The hierarchy and functional specializations of the caste system has been absorbed, to some extent, into contemporary forms of class differentiation. The Brahmans, Kayasthas and Baidyas formed a group of highly literate castes in Bengal which became closely involved in colonial political and administrative structures. This group, which formed the nucleus of the expanding middle-class in the later nineteenth century, was well placed to exploit the limited openings offered by the expansion of the imperial bureaucracy with its demand for lower level administrative personnel (Mc Guire 1983 cited in Standing 1991:39).

However, things started changing in India before Independence. In India today the level of education is related to the nature of employment one takes up. Hence, a woman belonging to any caste group is by law eligible to take up any employment suitable to her qualifications.

Women in Calcutta: The Years of Change (1900-1947)

The position of women in Calcutta started changing during the early part of this century. According to Ray (1990):

> In traditional Hindu society, the basic unit - the family - was patrilineal in descent, patrilocal in residence and patriarchal in authority. The denial of women's right to inheritance and gainful employment was ensured by denying them education and keeping her under purdah.... A change began in the nineteenth century when, chiefly through the new ideas brought by Western education, the improvement of the position of women became one of the main sectors of social reform.... A movement was started for female education. With education, women acquired an awareness of their exploitation both individually and as a social group.... It was in the twentieth century that large numbers of women in Calcutta first made their entry into the world beyond the four walls of their home. The Bengal Women's Education League (1928), the outcome of the Bengal Women's Educational Conference held in Calcutta in 1927, kept itself confined to the educational sphere. The All Bengal Women's Union (1932), on the contrary, fought social discrimination against the sex, and especially the immoral traffic in women. It set up rescue homes for abducted and molested women, and marked perhaps 'the first independent and

> conscious efforts of Indian women to help their more unfortunate sisters' (Ray 1990:34-39).

After Independence a noteworthy development was the introduction of co-education in Calcutta at the college and vocational level. This change offered women students an opportunity to meet their male counterparts on equal terms. Women started participating in the corporate life of the college, especially in debates, drama and sports.

Women have moved into the labour force through a variety of different circumstances in response to a range of needs partly defined by their class position and partly by other social and cultural parameters. Bagchi (1990) in her work on women in Calcutta states that:

> It was mainly economic need that led women in Calcutta to make the transition from the home to the world. But even a temporary respite from household chores spelt freedom for women; moreover it gave them command over money which they could claim as their own.

Recent increases in the employment of middle and upper-middle class women in Calcutta and other urban areas must be set in perspective against the overall decrease in the employment of women in India. The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) stated that:

> A macro-analysis reveals that women's economic participation has been declining since 1921, both in percentage of workers to total female population and in their percentage to the total labour force.[19] In the initial phase of industrial development, textiles and jute (the earliest industries)

[19] There were changes made in the definitions of workers between the 1961 and 1971 censuses. It has been argued that at least part of the reported decline in female labour force participation results from the exclusion of secondary activity from the definition of workers. The ICSSR discusses the issues and concludes that "the impact of changing definitions is only marginal and that the declining participation trend of women has been a continuous one" (ICSSR 1975:62).

> as well as plantations and mines continued the traditional pattern of family participation and employed large numbers of women and children, confining them to certain unskilled and semi-skilled types of work at lower wage rates. Technological [and demographic] changes have since affected the employment of women in these industries adversely (ICSSR 1975:61).

Also,

> Against this overall decrease in female employment in India, the increased participation of middle class-urban women is all the more striking. The number of women in the professions, and especially in clerical and related occupations, has increased rapidly. For example, for all of India the percentages of teachers who are women increased from 18 per cent to 37 per cent at the middle level, from 19 per cent to 30 per cent at the secondary level, and from 8.5 per cent (1950-51) to 15 per cent (1970-71) in colleges and universities (ICSSR 1975: 158-159). The number of women who are physicians, nurses, lawyers and social workers has also increased. The numbers of women in clerical positions in both the public and private sectors have increased even more rapidly from low initial levels. All available data indicate that jobs as receptionists, clerks, stenographers and typists are absorbing more and more educated women (ICSSR 1975: 75).

What are the reasons for the general trend towards increasing participation of urban middle-class women in the labour market? The National Committee on the Status of Women in India suggests four reasons:

> 1) Constitutional guarantee of non-discrimination and equality of opportunity in matters of employment;
> 2) Development of women's education and their subsequent entry into areas of education and employment hitherto monopolised by men;
> 3) A gradual change in social values relating to women's paid employment among the urban-middle class, due to growing economic pressures;
> 4) Expansion of the tertiary sector as a direct consequence of development in the post-independence period (ICSSR 1975:75).

When a woman in Calcutta is asked about the advantages of being employed, her response is often economic. Women in Calcutta as elsewhere need

jobs to earn money. Among middle-class families today financial pressures are very evident (Debi 1988; Standing 1991).

Part of this pressure is the result of the worldwide inflation created by recent world food shortages and the oil crisis. In Bengal recent prices, especially of cooking oils and food grains, have risen so that, outside of ration shops, prices are virtually on a par with the world market level. This inflation has affected all sections of society and is relatively recent.

Additional economic pressures include the loss of income from rural land and the status devaluation of secondary and even college education. These changes have specific effects on the relative position of the middle class but have occurred more gradually.

The over-representation of 'East Bengalis' (that is Bengali Hindus who belonged to what is now Bangladesh) in many urban professions is often attributed to the economic jolt resulting from their loss of land either in 1947 or at the time of a later migration. The loss of income and capital, and the security they represented, has forced East Bengalis to rely more extensively on education to increase their earning capacity.

Another factor which facilitated the movement of urban middle-class women into the labour market has been a rapidly decreasing birth rate in that segment of population. This change may in turn be seen as an economic response to the shifting value of a child, at least in the middle classes, from an economic asset to an economic liability. With fewer children, child-bearing and child-rearing consume less of the middle-class woman's productive years and enhance her possibilities for employment outside the home, thereby increasing her

family's absolute and relative economic position and allowing them to maintain the standard of living to which they have been accustomed.

Women of middle-class cultural background face cultural restrictions on the range of employment they may seek. Their preponderance in what were, traditionally, segregated and thus 'respectable' occupations such as teaching and medicine is a reminder that occupational profiles have a history and a cultural location in the specific construction of 'suitable work' for women.

The situation amongst the lower class is very different. Here women are frequently under greater pressure to enter employment, taking whatever jobs they can find in order to supplement or sustain their family income. Given the fact that female work force participation rates have been traditionally low in Bengal compared to other parts of India, and declined dramatically between 1911 and 1961, Banerjee (1985a) observed:

> Recent data show that in the urban areas, women's employment is increasing at a steady rate in an otherwise stagnant market. It is evident that women as a group accept wage rates and employment conditions inferior to those of other workers. These two factors taken together imply that women's employment is increasing at the cost of male employment and the relation between male and female employment is no longer complementary but competitive. Women in the urban economy are employed largely outside their household occupations and their wages form an important part of total family income (Banerjee 1985a:24).

Women and Employment in the Organised Sector of India and West Bengal

As this study is based on the domestic lives of women in white-collar jobs we need to examine the nature of women's employment in the organised sector in India with special reference to West Bengal. The Annual Report for 1996-1997 of the Ministry of Labour states:

> The employment of women in the organised sector (both Public and Private Sectors) as on 31 st March, 1995, was about 4.23 million. This constitutes 15.44% of the total organised sector employment in the country. Within the organised sector, public sector accounts for more employment of women than the private sector (Ministry of Labour, 1997:87)

The following table gives an idea of employment of women in the organised sector of India and West Bengal, which is one of the few states which lead in women's employment in the organised sector. An important reason for this is that West Bengal is also a plantation state (Ministry of Labour, 1997:87).

Table 3.11 Employment of Women in the Organised Sector of India and West Bengal (Employment Figures in Thousands in March 1996)

	Public Sector	Private Sector	Total
India	2610.6	1777.2	4387.8
West Bengal	116.2	102.4	218.6

Source: Ministry of Labour 1997.

Both in India as a whole and in West Bengal in particular more women are employed in the public than in the private sector.

Conclusion

The trend towards greater female paid employment highlights the importance of this issue for analysis. Most studies on employed women have been done in Western India and have not been representative of other regions of India. These studies are also localised and cannot provide full analysis of regional

variations in the employment situation, norms and behaviour of middle-class women. Only a handful of studies are available from West Bengal (Fruzzetti and Ostor 1976; Chakraborty 1978; Bardhan 1984; Debi 1987; Standing 1991; Kundu and Nag 1996). In recent years, there has been a shift away from studies on middle-class women, because funding bodies tend to focus on rural women and women in the lower classes of urban areas in development studies.

Calcutta is one of the most populous cities in India with a population of over 9 million. The principal language spoken is Bengali and the city has a fast growing middle class. With migrants coming to the city from all adjoining states in search of a better life the city is very densely populated with about 23,670 persons living per square kilometre.

Education is highly prized among the Bengali community and over the last ten years there has been an improvement in both male and female literacy (75.2 and 65.1 per cent respectively) in the city. With a gradual but steady increase in women's employment in West Bengal mean age at marriage for women has also increased in urban areas from 20.5 years in 1971 to 21.5 years in 1981.

There has also been a decrease in fertility rates. These changed demographic characteristics which facilitate the entry of women into white-collar jobs raise issues about the relationship between employment and gender equality. The next chapter describes the method of data collection and the major characteristics of the sample of the study.

CHAPTER 4

THE STUDY AND THE SAMPLE

Introduction

In this chapter I outline the nature of the data and the method of data collection. The chapter also describes the social, economic and family background of the respondents, including their education and employment status, age, type of marriage, type and size of the family, family income and husband's qualification and employment.

Data

Two groups of women were studied: 50 employed married women and 50 married women who were not in paid employment. All women in the sample were aged between 25 and 45 years and all had at least one tertiary degree. It is assumed that women's interest in employment, in particular, formal employment, and their success in obtaining it, are likely to be influenced by the extent of their educational training. However, educational level is largely constant for women in my sample (all have college education).[1]

Data were collected by means of a self-completed questionnaire. I also conducted in-depth interviews with selected respondents (N=30). The fieldwork was carried out between August 1996 and January 1997.

[1] In India after finishing school if one wants to continue with further education one can attend college for 3-5 years and then go to university where postgraduate studies are conducted.

Variable Definitions

Independent Variable. Paid employment is the main independent variable. It is hypothesised that women's access to paid employment will bring about a certain degree of gender equality in family household organisation.

Dependent Variable. The three main dependent variables for this study are the domestic division of labour between husbands and wives; women's level of autonomy within the family; and women's sex role attitudes.

Universe of the Study

This study does not cover the entire population of women in Calcutta. It is confined to a particular category of people, namely middle-class Bengali women. Furthermore, this study has been restricted to women in urban white-collar jobs because of the desire to minimise diversity of experience.

Sample Selection

The sample was drawn on as random a basis as possible, in order to obtain a group of respondents with a range of ages, family backgrounds, and employment. Because sample sizes are small, it is impossible to generalise my results to the Bengali community in West Bengal.

Since India is a land of great cultural complexity, contradictions and regional variation, the sample was restricted in a number of ways outlined below. First, all of the respondents were from the Hindu Bengali community. Second,

the sample was restricted to women between the ages of 25 and 45 years. Third, all the women in this study are educated to college level. Fourth, the employed women were all in white-collar jobs and maybe classified as professional workers. Fifth, the survey was limited to women who were currently married and living with their husbands, with or without children. The survey excluded single, widowed or divorced women since the focus is on the division of labour and decision-making among couples. Finally, the sample was restricted to middle-class women from the upper three castes. For employed women this is indicated by both their own and their husband's occupation and income. For the sample not in paid employment, class is based on husband's occupation and income.

Method of Selection

It proved easier to survey employed women because I could construct a sample simply by going to places of work. Employed women also respond well to surveys, partly because they are used to participating in them.

From several public offices[2] a list of names of women employees was obtained and the sample of 50 employed women was selected on the basis of random sampling. Women from the list obtained were selected for the study and administered a questionnaire.[3] They were given a few days to complete the

[2] 'Public offices' refers to offices run by the Central Government of India. Names of women employees were collected from the respective Heads of the selected offices. Note that in India gathering lists of employees for any social research from public offices is not an ethical issue and hence by obtaining the list of women employees no ethical conventions were violated.

[3] From the group of both employed and non-employed women the response rate was very good. Even though women were given the option of refusal they were very eager and voluntarily agreed to complete the questionnaires. There were no refusals. However, two non-employed women later were reluctant to be interviewed.

questionnaire and hand it back to the researcher. Thus, it was necessary to make two or three visits to a particular office: the first time to seek permission, meet women and administer questionnaires and the second time to collect them. In many cases a third visit was necessary as some women did not fill in the questionnaire by the set time.

Selection of the sample of non-employed women presented a greater problem because it was impossible to generate a complete list of their names. Therefore, a different procedure had to be adopted. I visited several multi-storey apartment complexes.[4] After a meeting with the secretary of each complex, in which I explained to him the nature and purpose of the research, I obtained a list of the names of all the non-employed women.[5] I then undertook a door-to-door survey. Generally I made more than one visit: the first to explain the purpose of the survey and to administer the questionnaire and the second to collect the questionnaire.

For the selection of 50 women in the second group, a list of 100 households with non-employed women was collected. I then obtained the 50 households by random sampling. Two apartment blocks in the same part of Calcutta (south Calcutta) were chosen for the study.

The Questionnaire

The bulk of the data was collected through a structured questionnaire.

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[4] In total I visited 5 multi storey apartment complexes.

[5] All the non-employed women were full-time housewives when the survey was conducted in the latter half of 1996. However,18 non-employed women had worked in the past but left their jobs because of family constraints.

Two questionnaires were constructed, one for employed women and the other for non-employed women. The main difference between them was that the one for non-employed women did not contain a section on current employment. The questionnaire contained both structured and open-ended questions covering specific topics relating to a wide range of issues: demographic details, family composition, employment characteristics (where relevant), the domestic division of labour, decision-making within the family, and attitudinal questions on various social issues.

The questionnaire was 14 pages long for employed women and 10 pages for those not employed. Each questionnaire was attached to a cover letter which explained the purpose of the study. The questionnaire is contained in Appendix C.

Statistical Techniques Used for the Analysis of Data

Data from the structured survey were coded and transferred to the computer for statistical analysis. Checks were run on the data for coding errors and mistakes were rectified before analysis proceeded. In-depth interviews were transcribed before their use in elaborating the statistical analysis.

In the analysis of gender equality within families of employed and non-employed women, simple percentage differences are used to draw inferences, supplemented by qualitative analysis of the in-depth interviews.

The Interviews

The second source of data are the in-depth qualitative interviews. The questionnaire was administered to the women, followed in 30 cases by in-depth interviews. Thirty in-depth interviews were undertaken with women selected equally from the employed and non-employed groups (that is 15 from each group). Some women with very traditional divisions of labour, decision-making and sex role attitudes were chosen, in addition to others with more egalitarian divisions, decision-making and sex role attitudes, and others who fell between these two groups. All names used in this study for respondents are pseudonyms.

The questionnaire took up to an hour and a half to administer, depending on the extent of rapport established between the respondent and the researcher. The questionnaire was explained fully and left with the respondent for later collection by the researcher at a date and time suitable for the respondent. The questionnaire was designed to hold a respondent's attention as much as possible. Both objective and subjective questions were asked and more sensitive issues were asked in the second half of the questionnaire. In contrast to the questionnaire the in-depth interviews took the form of an extended discussion rather than an interview as such. The information sought in these interviews was primarily qualitative. The questions were open-ended, and the respondents were encouraged to elaborate their views on different issues.

Problems Faced During Data Collection

A number of problems arose during the course of data collection. Some public officials in the offices where the data for employed women were collected

were reluctant to provide a list of names of women employees, let alone to let them be interviewed. Some employers felt that such information might be sensitive and might encroach on the private lives of employees. So officials as well as respondents had to be assured that the data collected would be strictly confidential and used for no purpose other than that of research.

Employed women were administered questionnaires at their place of work, housewives in their homes. If an eligible respondent was not available, the interviewer usually scheduled an appointment for an interview through a friend (for employed women) or a household member (for non-employed women), or returned at another time when the person was likely to be present. During the interviews questions on the domestic division of labour, decision-making and sex role attitudes were again covered in detail. The interviews averaged an hour and half and were tape-recorded.[6]

Although warned that respondents might resist the use of a tape recorder for the in-depth interviews, I found in my interviews that it was generally acceptable. Most of the interviews were conducted in Bengali and were later transcribed and translated into English. The transcribed in-depth data are incorporated with the analysis in the following chapters.

While interviewing technical workers I experienced some problems because of their irregular working hours. Sometimes they were not in a position to know in advance their exact duty hours. Because of their long and variable hours of work, they were often tired. Transcription problems were also

[6] All data (through questionnaires and interviews) for the study were collected by the researcher.

encountered, because interviews were often held in noisy offices. Most of these women did not have a separate office of their own.

In the case of interviews conducted in homes, a similar problem was encountered when women had young children present. However, despite these problems the interviews were generally successful. Some respondents found them an opportunity to discuss their problems by talking to the researcher. They opened up and discussed issues not directly related to the study. In these cases the discussions were usually frank and wide ranging. In some cases, the researcher was invited to tea before or after the interview.

Response to the Survey

There were no refusals to fill in the questionnaire by employed women, and in the case of non-employed women there were only two refusals. On the whole the response to the survey was good, for several reasons. Most importantly, women were interested in the project. People who were particularly interested in the study were interested in research in general: some were working on higher degrees themselves or had husbands who had received, or were working, on higher degrees. Many were interested in the role of employed women in the household decision-making process. Many had views they wanted to express as working mothers. If they felt that it was important for mothers to be at home while their children were growing up, they were eager to say so. Those who felt otherwise were just as eager to express their views.

Shortcomings of the Survey

The main limitation of this study is that the sample size is small and consists only of women from the Bengali community. Hence, my analysis and discussion focus primarily on middle-class Bengali women and pay limited attention to Indian women more generally. The sample is too homogeneous to permit broader generalisations to Indian women as a whole.

These disadvantages aside, the main advantage of my survey lies in the completeness of the information received. Moreover, the homogeneity of the sample provides a clearer focus on the central problem. I can thus concentrate on studying the effects of well-defined variables on the division of labour and decision-making of both employed and non-employed Bengali women.

Another advantage of the study stems from the fact that it goes some way toward filling a gap in our knowledge about the domestic lives of Bengali women. Virtually no previous research has been conducted on their domestic division of labour and decision-making patterns.

Sample Characteristics

It is important to establish the background of the respondents because their social and cultural background may have strong effects on their life patterns, both within and outside the family. Any assessment of the differences in the lives of women has to start from an analysis of their social background and its influence on their lives. Among the variables I analyse are age, education, fertility status, family, kinship and type of household structure.

Age Group

Age is an important variable in this study because older women generally have more authority and autonomy in their family. In India age has great significance as far as domestic autonomy is concerned (Devendra 1980; Maurya 1988; Inden 1990; Mitter 1991). In a developing country like India both men and women attain the freedom to act independently only after they reach a certain age.

Accordingly this study examines whether the allocation of tasks and the power to make decisions also depend on age. To investigate this issue, women from different age groups were selected from both the employed and the non-employed categories. Table 4.1 gives the distribution of respondents on the basis of their age.

Table 4.1 Age Distribution (column percentages)

Age group yeas	Employed Women (N=50)	Non-Employed Women (N=50)
25-29	12	12
30-34	24	16
35-39	20	26
40-45	44	46
Total	100	100
Mean age	37	38

Table 4.1 shows that the bulk of the sample consists of women in the age group of 40-45 years. The mean age of the respondents is 37 years for employed women and 38 years for non-employed women. The age structure of the sample covers the child-bearing and career formation years. This distribution was

deliberately chosen because it is during these years that we would expect to see the most tension between home and work and the establishment of patterns of combining paid and unpaid work.

Age of Husbands

The age of the husband is important for this study because in Bengali society it is usually assumed that older men have more traditional views about the domestic division of labour within the household (Roy 1975; Chakraborty 1978; Debi 1988; Standing 1991). Amongst the sample of employed women a majority have had love marriages. They married men whom they met through work. Hence, the age of the husbands of the employed women is closer to their own age.

On the other hand, non-employed women tended to have had arranged marriages. They married men who were more qualified, earned more and were more well established in their careers. Thus, the age difference between husband and wife is larger. Table 4.2 shows that the majority of the husbands (78 per cent) of the employed women fall within the age group of 30-49 years whereas for non-employed women it is within the higher age group of 40-59 years (70 per cent).

Table 4.2 Age Group of Husbands (column percentages)

Age group of husbands (yrs)	Employed Women (N=50)	Non-Employed Women (N=50)
25-29	4	2
30-39	40	28
40-49	38	40
50-59	18	30
Total	100	100
Mean age	42	46

Education

Education plays an important part in the lives of women in India (Ghosh 1989; Devasia and Devasia 1990; Chanana 1990, 1993; Pande 1992; Jeffery 1993; King and Hill 1993). It widens their outlook and opens up considerably greater opportunities for employment compared to non-educated women. There is a direct relationship between higher education and better jobs. As a result the educational strategies of middle-class Bengali families in Calcutta are changing rapidly as greater numbers of women enter paid employment. Moreover, the desire for a higher standard of living and acceptance of women's employment have been significant factors in creating a positive attitude towards women's employment in Bengali society. There is also a matrimonial factor: an educated girl is often felt to be more acceptable as a bride today because of her increased potential for employment (if she does not have a job already).

Women with a minimum of one graduate degree were selected for the study. Graduate study is highly desirable in Bengali society, both for marriage negotiations and for status.

Table 4.3 Education Levels (column percentages)

Education level	Employed Women (N=50)	Non-Employed Women (N=50)
PhD	24	4
Masters	40	12
Graduate (honours)	20	14
Graduate (pass)	16	70
Total	100	100

As might be expected, Table 4.3 shows that the number of years of formal education for employed women is greater than that for non-employed women. This stems from the fact that more highly educated women are more likely to seek employment than less educated women. In this study the employed sample comprised 24 per cent with PhDs and 40 per cent with a Masters degree, while the non-employed sample was dominated by women with a basic graduate degree only (70 per cent). This patterns suggest a strong relationship between education and employment.

Education is generally thought to have an effect on age at marriage, primarily because going to school and being married are usually viewed as incompatible roles. Therefore the longer a girl spends in school, the later she is likely to marry (Raju and Bagchi 1993; Jeffery and Basu 1997).

Marriage Type

Out of the total of 50 employed women, 36 entered paid employment before marriage and have since remained in employment. Economic self-sufficiency may have acted as an incentive to delay marriage. For some women,

involvement in paid work may have been so intense that a choice was made in favour of career over marriage.

Marriage involves an increase in household responsibilities, and often a change in place of residence. Once women enter the labour force, they are not likely to withdraw from it even after their marriage or on becoming mothers. This is quite different from the custom in Western countries such as Australia (Baxter et al. 1990; Baxter 1993). The important reason is that in India (especially in the public sector) most positions are full-time tenured positions. As a result, in the absence of part-time positions, women continue with their jobs both after marriage and motherhood. Hence, the decision to enter the labour force or not is made early in life. In other words, marriage and maternal status do not wholly condition women's tendency to enter paid employment. The tendency among married women to enter employment does not depend upon their marital or maternal status but on their earlier career decisions.

Marriage is almost universal in Indian society simply because economically dependent women cannot choose to remain unmarried. In India marriages have traditionally been arranged by parents. However, higher educational experiences of women in recent years (especially since independence) invariably exposed greater numbers of young women to wider social contacts as well as to employment opportunities. This exposure has been conducive to more marriages being decided by the women themselves: so called 'love marriages'.[7] Employment and marriage type are inter-related.

[7] Parents of a few women from the sample had to give dowry for their daughter's marriage even though they had 'love marriages'.

Table 4.4 Marriage Type (column percentages)

Marriage type	Employed women (N=50)	Non-employed women (N=50)
Arranged	44	78
Love	56	22
Total	100	100

As shown in Table 4.4 employed women are more likely to have had love marriages than non-employed women. This difference is probably due to the fact that employed women have more opportunity than non-employed women to move outside the home, and consequently greater chances of meeting non-family members. Similar results were reported by Kapur (1970):

> Going through the percentage distribution of the working women according to the kind of their marriage, it is found that marriages of 55 per cent of working women were love marriages while those of 46 per cent of them were arranged marriages. (Kapur 1970:58).

This study shows that among non-employed women arranged marriages are more common, although modifications in arranged marriages commonly are observed among urban educated families.[8]

Age at Marriage

One of the major social problems in India curbed by legislation is child marriage. In 1929, the *Sarda Act* or the *Child Marriage Restraint Act* was passed. The minimum age for marriage according to this act for males was 18 and for

[8] It is becoming common in arranged marriages today to allow the intended couple to see each other and sometimes have a brief courtship before they get married. This period of getting to know each other differs from family to family.

females 14. This Act was further amended in 1949 by raising the age of marriage for females to 15 years. However, the *Special Marriage Act of 1954* raised the minimum age to 21 for males and to 18 for females (Vohra and Sen 1986; Mehta 1987; Ghadially 1988; Parashar 1992; Paranjpe 1992; Pant 1995).

Traditionally, women in India, particularly in the rural areas, married at a very early age. While the situation has changed only marginally in rural India, there has been a greater change in urban areas, where the age at marriage of women has risen sharply (Jha 1980; Ramu 1989; Karkal and Rajan 1989; Chauhan 1996). This change has been facilitated by factors such as employment and education. The employment of women gives them some economic independence, which in turn affects their situation in regard to marriage. With changing socio-economic conditions in India, women started taking up education in increasing numbers and, eventually, salaried jobs. Thus, they are more exposed to changing beliefs and values.

It is expected that more extensive higher education and relative occupational, economic and social independence will lead to a higher age at marriage for the employed women in my sample compared to the non-employed group. Educated women resist early marriages because education takes time to be completed. As all the women in the current sample had at least one graduate degree very few married before the age of 21.

A woman's decision about when to marry is thus influenced by her desire for education, her inclination to enter paid work, her labour force status before marriage, her residence (urban/rural) and her family background. Table 4.5 shows

that there is a positive relationship between a woman's employment and her age at marriage.

Table 4.5 Age at Marriage (column percentages)

Age at marriage (years)	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
17-20	4	28
21-24	22	36
25-28	44	26
29-32	24	10
33-36	4	0
37-40	2	0
Total	100	100
Mean age	27	23

Though the *Special Marriage Act* had fixed the minimum age of marriage for a female to 18 years, one employed woman and two non-employed women were married by the age of 17 years. However, the table shows that 44 per cent of employed women married between the ages of 25 and 28 years whereas in the case of non-employed women 36 per cent married between the ages of 21 and 24 years. Thus, the preference for a later age at marriage among employed women noted by other studies on Indian women is apparent in my data.

The mean age at marriage for employed women is 27 years and for non-employed women it is 23 years. The employed women postponed marriage presumably because employment decreases the attraction of marriage by providing women with the option of improving their financial status and security through their own efforts rather than relying on their husbands.

Place of Birth

The early socialisation of children is critical for their future outlook, attitudes and values (Das Gupta 1987; Dube 1988; World Bank 1991; N. Kumar 1994). Hence the social background of the respondent is important for understanding current patterns within the family. Environmental factors also play a part in the development of an individual's attitudes and are reflected in their achievements later in life. For example in India, women born raised and educated in urban areas enjoy advantages over women raised in rural areas, and develop different attitudes and values.

The data show that most women, whether employed or not employed, are not migrants from other parts of India but were born in Calcutta and have lived in Calcutta throughout their lives. A small number were born in other parts of India and migrated to Calcutta because of employment or marriage.

Table 4.6 Place of Birth (column percentages)

Place of birth	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
East & West Bengal	78	78
Other parts of India	22	22
Total	100	100

Table 4.6 shows that most respondents (78 per cent of both groups) were born and raised in Bengal.[9] The remaining 22 per cent from each group were born

[9] One respondent was born in then East Bengal which is now Bangladesh. Her parents moved to Calcutta in 1958.

in other parts of India and moved to Calcutta later.[10]

Fertility

In Bengali society children are desired by most couples. For a woman, the birth of her first child gives her increased status in society and in her family, and it enhances her self image (Dyson and Moore 1983; Jejeebhoy 1987; Dyson 1992; Rajan et al. 1993; Savitri 1994). Infertility is seen as a 'bad fate' and causes emotional suffering (Jejeebhoy 1988, 1991, 1995). So it is not surprising that, as Table 4.7 shows, most women in the sample have children. The number of children women have differs by their educational attainment. Women who are illiterate tend to have more children than those who are educated. Because all the women in the sample were educated most had only one or two children. Later marriage reduces a woman's reproductive years. As already noted, educated women tend to defer marriage until after they finish their education. But education also helps to reduce fertility levels by increasing awareness of the advantages of limiting family size.

Table 4.7 Fertility Levels (column percentages)

Fertility levels	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Have children	84	90
Childless	16	10
Total	100	100

[10] Calcutta is where they lived when the study was conducted in 1996.

In addition to education and employment a major factor that influences levels of fertility of Indian women is family planning. Typically, the number and ages of children in a family reflect awareness and practice of family planning. Similarly the number of children a woman has sheds light on important matters like the extent of her domestic responsibilities and her needs, if employed, for organised child care.

A knowledge of family planning is common among middle-class Bengali women, irrespective of their employment status (Chakraborty 1978; Debi 1988). Women's right to decide the number of children they should have is increasingly recognised in Bengali society (Debi 1988).

The economic status of the family, the education level of both the husband and the wife and their employment status also affect the size of the family in Bengali society (Roy 1973; Bhattacharjee 1976; Standing 1991; Sykes 1992). Also, in this study employment status, especially that of the wife, was observed to be the most decisive factor influencing family size. However, it is important to establish whether the views of women about ideal family size are in any way influenced by the respondent's actual family size. Table 4.8 provides relevant data.

Table 4.8 Number of Children (column percentages)

Number of children	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
No children	16	10
One child	52	54
Two children	26	34
Three children	6	2
Total	100	100
Mean number of children	1.22	1.24

Over half the women in the sample had only one child. This low fertility may be due to the fact that children are a 'cost' to middle-class parents as far as their education is concerned.[11] Families with just one child or at the most two children have become more common. Very few women from either group had three children.

Another important variable affecting the lives of women within the family is the age of the youngest child. Women with young children typically spend more time on child care activities than women with older children. The age of the children (especially for employed women) has great relevance for a study of this kind because such information throws light on the need for child care facilities outside the home (if not available from other family members) and the division of child care between women and their husbands.

As we have already seen, the employed women married at a higher age than the non-employed women. As a result they have more young children than do the non-employed women. The employed women have in total 38 children

[11] In case of daughters marriage and payment of dowry is also an important consideration.

below the age of 10 living at home, whereas the non-employed women have only 27 children of the same age. As is shown in later chapters, the age of the youngest child affects the domestic division of labour within the household.

Type of Family

All the women in the sample lived in family-based households. Indian families can be categorised into three different types: joint families, extended families, and nuclear families. These three types of families are commonly found among the Bengali community.

An 'extended family' in India is often called a 'joint family'. The traditional 'joint and extended family' in India is characterised as a group of people related by blood or by marriage, living in the same house with a common religion and worship, hearth and common property.[12]

Table 4.9 Type of Family (column percentages)

Family type	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Joint family	46	24
Extended family	14	6
Nuclear family	40	70
Total	100	100

With regard to family type and size of the household, the situation of employed women is quite different from that of non-employed women. Table 4.9

[12] See Page 40 for a detailed definition on 'joint and extended families' in India

presents the classification of the respondents on the basis of the type of families in which they live. This table shows that most employed women live in joint or extended families (60 per cent) whereas most non-employed women (70 per cent) live in nuclear families. For employed women the joint or extended family has a number of advantages. Despite the fact that the obligations of family duties increase in a joint or extended family, women with young children may find it more convenient to live in a joint or extended family because there is someone to look after the children in their absence.

In India, there is a dearth of public child care services and hence employed women may prefer to live in joint or extended families rather than in nuclear families.[13] Although in a joint family a woman may be relieved of some child care duties, at the same time she may spend more time on other household duties. Participation in decision-making may also be restricted compared to women in nuclear families, who may share more equally with their husbands in the family decision-making process.

Head of the Family

In Bengal the family is patrilineal (J. Sharma 1980; Das Gupta 1986; Martin 1997). In a patrilineal family the male is the perpetuator of the line and family name and is typically the head of the household. Table 4.10 shows that most women live in families where the husbands are the formal heads of households.

[13] Despite the fact that 'joint families' have certain disadvantages (see chapter 5 for details) employed women still continue to live in 'joint families' especially for the child care that they can receive from the relatives.

Table 4.10 Head of the Family (column percentages)

Head of household	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Parents and in-laws	36	20
Husband	64	80
Total	100	100

Table 4.10 shows that in 4 out of 5 households of non-employed women husbands are heads of households. Also for two out of three employed women husbands are heads of households. It appears that for women employment does not confer any authority as the head of household. Where women live in joint families, it is usually the eldest male member (often the husband's father) who is the head of the family and is in charge of making important decisions.

Husband's Background

Another important variable determining the socio-economic position of women is the occupation of their husbands, because a married woman's position in the family is largely determined by her husband's income. The socio-economic status of middle-class families in India is determined by the profession and income of the male breadwinner or the husband (Mohan 1989; Mathur 1992). While women's employment may increase the household income, it is still the husband's occupation and income that mainly determine a family's socio-economic status.

Table 4.11 Husband's Income from all Sources (column percentages)

Husband's income	Employed women (N=50)	Non Employed women (N=50)
Rs 2,1001-Rs 6,000	38	10
Rs 6,001-Rs 10,000 & above	62	90
Total	100	100

Note: During the time of field work (Aug 96-Feb 97) when the data was collected the rate of exchange was Rupees (Rs) 26=Australian $1.

Table 4.11 shows most husbands of non-employed women are in the higher income range (Rs 6,001-10,000) with only 10 per cent in the lower income range (Rs 2,001-6,000). This reflects the fact that most of the non-employed women (78 per cent) had arranged marriages, and one of the important considerations in an arranged marriage is the job and income of the proposed bridegroom. As a result most non-employed women were married to men in higher-paying jobs. On the other hand, more employed women (56 per cent) had 'love marriages': they married men who were colleagues earning similar income, or men whom they met through work. Hence a large minority (38 per cent) of the husbands of the employed women were in the lower income group compared to the non-employed respondents.

A similar pattern is evident in relation to husband's educational qualifications. Like income, the qualification of the bridegroom is also an important consideration in negotiating a Bengali arranged marriage (Roy 1975; Borthwick 1984; Standing 1991). Respondents followed the norm of marrying men who were at least as educated as they were. None of the women were

married to men who did not have a graduate degree, the essential prerequisite for a white-collar job.

The data show that 62 per cent of the husbands of the employed women had this minimum qualification whereas 38 per cent had a higher degree. On the other hand, 44 per cent of the husbands of the non-employed women had only a first degree, but 56 per cent had higher degrees.

Employment Background of Employed Women in the Sample

Though paid employment for women is a new phenomenon in the Bengali community, middle-class Bengali women are taking a greater interest in employment, in part to cope with the emerging economic crisis and to escape the dowry problem (Debi 1988; Standing 1991).

Bengali men are increasingly opting for employed wives rather than dowry, because employed wives provide them with additional income for their families. Compared to the private sector, public sector offices such as the ones from which the sample was drawn provide employment opportunities to a large proportion of women in Calcutta.

Most of the employed women in this sample entered employment immediately after completing their education. Their mean age when they first entered paid employment was 25.3 years. Out of 50 employed women the majority (60 per cent) started employment between 18 and 25 years. This is the age at which the central government and the state government organisations recruit candidates for employment. Another 26 per cent had entered paid employment when they were between 26 and 33 years. Only 4 per cent of women

in the sample entered employment at a higher age. Most women (72 per cent) were employed before marriage and did not leave their job on marriage. Another 18 per cent began work after marriage. Only 6 per cent and 4 per cent entered paid employment after the birth of their first and last child respectively.

This pattern can be explained in two different ways. First, women with an economically independent status wanted to retain their status even after marriage. Second, the dual salary is likely to help in raising the standard of living and also in providing better education for children.

Types of Jobs

The kinds of jobs women have may influence their gender equality within the household in relation to the domestic division of labour and decision-making (Kurian and Ghosh 1981; Sen and Sen 1985; Sud 1991; R. Kumar 1994; Prasad 1995). It may be assumed that women with high ranking jobs have more power at their place of work. Does this affect their position within the household by giving them more authority within the family? These questions are examined in succeeding chapters.

Table 4.12 Types of Jobs (column percentages)

Job type	Employed women (N=50)
Non-management	78
Supervisor	12
Lower manager	10
Total	100

This question was not applicable to half of the sample which consisted of non-employed women.

Table 4.12 shows that most women (78 per cent) work as non-management employees at their place of work. Even though they are non-management employees 11 of them (22 per cent) supervise subordinates in their work. The remaining 6 (12 per cent) are supervisors while 5 (10 per cent) are lower managers with responsibility for supervising subordinates.

Data were also collected on the decision-making power of employed women in regard to different aspects of their paid work. Having authority at work may positively or negatively affect their decision-making power within the family. With regard to the question 'who decides when to come to work' 26 (52 per cent) responded that it was up to them to decide, for the other 24 (48 per cent) it was decided by someone else. This question was followed by another about whether the respondents could take the decision themselves 'to take a day off work without claiming sick leave, losing pay or having to make up for the time'. The results show that all but one could make this decision themselves. Data on 'the decision to slow the pace of work' and 'to introduce new work' show that 41 (82 per cent) can decide on their own to slow down their pace of work. Only nine (18 per cent) could not do so. Additionally 39 (78 per cent) could initiate new work without consulting their superiors while 11 (22 per cent) needed the approval of their superiors.

Salary

In Bengali society women are not generally considered to be the main breadwinner in the family (Debi 1988; Standing 1991). As indicated, women in this survey have taken up employment primarily in order to use their educational

qualifications and to have some independence in life. However, their salary may affect gender equality within their families. So it is useful to have a closer look at their income from their employment.

Since all of the women were selected from the public sector they are assumed to have a standardised pay scale. The distribution of income levels shows that only 4 per cent in the employed sample had a monthly income below Rs 2,000. Most (78 per cent) had a monthly income ranging between Rs 2,001 and 6,000. Only 18 per cent had a higher income (between Rs 6,001 and 12,000). Overall the figures show that the majority of the employed women belonged to the middle income group. Another question asked was whether the respondents had any other sources of income. Only two employed and six non-employed women answered 'yes' to this question.

Job As a Source of Satisfaction

Most women were satisfied with their jobs. Only 2 per cent of employed women said that their work was definitely not a source of satisfaction in their lives while 52 per cent of them said that it was. Thirty eight per cent said that probably it was. The remaining 8 per cent were not sure. Only five women would leave their jobs if they were given the opportunity, whereas 45 of the women definitely wanted to continue.

Employed women carry the burden of dual work both within and outside the family. As we shall see later, the fact that they are working does not alter their role as housewives nor bring gender equality within their families. In the next

chapter we will see that in the Bengali community employed women spend more time on work than their non-employed women peers.

Reasons for Taking up Employment

The reasons which women in this study gave for working outside the home are similar to those of previous researchers (Chakraborty 1978, Khanna and Verghese 1978; Pande 1992; Clark 1993; Giri 1998).

Table 4.13 Distribution of Respondents Giving Reasons for taking up Employment (column percentages)

Reasons	Employed women (N=50)	
	Yes	No
To be independent	54	46
Not to be a housewife	8	92
To use qualifications	58	42
To make money	26	74
To meet people	16	84
Nothing better to do	4	96

Respondents were given the option of multiple responses for taking up paid employment. These options were 'to be independent', 'to use educational qualifications', 'to meet people', 'to make money', 'did not want to be a housewife' and 'did not have anything better to do'. Each respondent could nominate more than one option if relevant. Of the total 50 respondents 29 reported a desire to use educational skills as their reason for entering the labour force. Another 27 wanted to be independent; 13 reported economic need or a

desire to make money as the reason for taking up paid employment; eight wanted to meet people. Only four mentioned not wanting to be a housewife and only two said they did not have anything better to do.

The reasons women take up employment are relevant to evaluating whether employment outside the home helps bring about gender equality in the domestic lives of women. These data suggest that women enter employment and remain employed even after marriage not only out of economic necessity but also for a variety of other motives. Thus, we see that women want to be in employment primarily because they are keen to use their educational qualifications. There are others who work in order to be economically independent and to avoid traditional economic dependence on men. Only very few said they took up employment because they did not have anything better to do.

Time Spent in Paid Employment

Most employed women (80 per cent) spend between 40 and 49 hours per week on their paid employment. Another 14 per cent work 30 to 39 hours; 4 per cent work between 50 and 59 hours; and only 2 per cent work between 20 and 29 hours. Compared to the time spent on paid work by employed women, most (84 per cent) of their husbands spend between 30 and 49 hours a week at their place of work. Husbands of employed women spend less time at work than their wives and less than the husbands of non-employed women. Most of the husbands (74 per cent) of the non-employed women spend 40-59 hours per week in paid employment.

Employment History of Non-Employed women

It is important to establish whether non-employed women were ever in paid employment and if so why they discontinued working. This will help us to understand the reasons for the discontinuation of their jobs. It will also enable us to study the nature of the family that they live in (traditional or modern) and the domestic division of labour arrangements within their households The data provide the following results. In this sample 36 per cent of the non-employed women had held jobs in the past but had to discontinue for various reasons, the most important being looking after children and finding more time to fulfill perceived duties towards their husbands and children. They felt that, they could not otherwise adequately discharge their duties as homemakers. Because of the scarcity of creches or day care centres in India and the lack or high cost, of labour-saving devices, they felt that it was necessary to give up their jobs.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the methodology used to examine the research questions and describes the main characteristics of the population under study. The data show that more non-employed than employed women have husbands in the higher age group. The older men are also the ones who are likely to earn more. As expected employed women are more educated than non-employed women and as a result marry later in life than non-employed women. Most non-employed women married soon after completing their education. Another difference between the two groups is the type of family they live in. More employed women prefer to live in joint families than non-employed women,

mainly because in joint families the problem of child-care is solved to a certain extent. As a result they are more likely to have parents-in-law who are formally the heads of the families, though in reality the husbands exercise final control and authority over household matters in both dual and single-earner households. Though the differences between the two types of samples are not striking, these differences may bring about greater gender equality within the families of these women.

I now turn to the first main research question, which is whether there are any differences in the domestic division of labour in households of employed and non-employed women. I also examine the division of labour between husbands and wives and how much time they each spend on domestic chores.

CHAPTER 5

DIVISION OF LABOUR IN THE HOME

Introduction

The entry of middle-class married women into paid labour is a source of major social change in Indian society. While women have always contributed to the support of their families through their unpaid household work, such work is not typically recognised as real work. But in recent years we have seen the emergence of two physically separated and socially distinct social roles for Indian women: one within the household and the other outside at their place of paid work. In Bengali culture, in particular cultural conditioning through socialisation, customs, rituals and traditions, encourages women to believe that their prime aim in life is to serve family and husband, and to bear, rear and look after children at home. One outcome is the perpetuation of a traditional division of labour based on sex, which assigns the tasks of home-making (cooking, cleaning, child rearing, sewing and mending) to women and the breadwinner role associated with authority and power to men (Rao and Rao 1982; Somjee 1989; Giri 1998).

In India the socialisation process teaches women from the time that they are children to play a subservient role, that is to be docile and submissive. They are socialised to expect that they will spend their lives being good wives, mothers and daughters-in-law. As such they will be responsible for domestic work and child care. This ideology is especially strong among rural women (Chanana 1988; Dube and Palriwala 1990; Upadhyay 1991). Today in India women's

participation is found in a wide range of occupations. Previous research shows that employed women have taken two full-time jobs: one at home and the other outside the home (Ramu 1989). In this chapter I examine the domestic division of labour and the extent to which employment of women alters it.

In earlier studies during the mid-1970s, feminist sociologists started treating housework as work (Oakley 1974). Prior to this period, housework was either ignored by social researchers or considered part of women's natural duty as mothers and wives. In the developed countries of the Western world research on the domestic division of labour has produced a huge literature. Many studies have concluded that, despite women's employment outside the home, little has changed. Working mothers, regardless of class, race or nationality, continue to perform most of the unpaid labour that goes into maintaining a household and bringing up children (Dempsey 1988, 1992, 1997). Studies show that household work and child care remain divided on the basis of gender (Horna 1989; Glezer 1991; Bittman, et al. 1993). As far as household work goes, women do most indoor work such as cooking, cleaning the house, laundry and cleaning up after meals. In addition they also do more child care than their husbands or any other members of their families (Haas 1992; Baxter 1993; Eveline 1994). Men usually do outdoor work such as repairing household items including cars, mowing the lawn and playing with children who are old enough not to need constant care (Berk 1985; Thompson and Walker 1989; Marini and Shelton 1993). Therefore, the results of these studies show that women do most of the mundane, repetitive and time-consuming work.

Why do women in every society seem to be untroubled by this clearly unequal division of labour within the family? This question is taken up by Baxter and Western (1998) in their study on men's and women's levels of satisfaction with the domestic division of labour in Australia:

> To explain these apparently contradictory arrangements several theories have been advanced, including women's lack of resources and power within marriage, which leaves women with few alternatives to existing arrangements; traditional gender role ideology, which encourages women to accept unequal workloads in the home; and, finally, the fact that wives often spend fewer hours in paid employment than husbands, contributing to the view that housework is women's primary responsibility (Baxter and Western 1998:1-2).

With the increasing involvement of married women in paid employment, women have effectively been doing two full-time jobs: one paid and the other unpaid. Though these studies have used different samples and different techniques of data collection, they have come up with similar results: wives do more household work and spend more time on it. Results from qualitative studies are not different either. They show that employed women in particular are constantly torn between the demands of work and home, which leads to a dual burden of paid and unpaid work (Berk 1985; Hochschild 1989). Hochschild (1989) also calculates that women work approximately 15 hours more each week than men or an extra month of 24-hour days a year (Hochschild 1989:3). Research based on time budget studies shows that employed women's husbands spend just a little more time on household tasks than do husbands of non-employed women. However, neither group of husbands do very much (Aldous 1982; Brannen and Wilson 1987; Dinnerstein 1992). Some researchers argue that

women's economic independence is the key to establishing a more egalitarian domestic division of labour (Voydanaff 1984; Wheelock 1990). Others are less convinced by this idea (Morris 1985). In her study of redundant steel workers and their wives, Morris (1985) argues that the employment status of male and female partners is a long way from being the only influence on the nature of domestic division of labour.

Australian studies have also shown that, in terms of time spent on household work, women do a lot more (70 per cent) around the house than men (30 per cent) (ABS 1994). Baxter (1993) states that:

> Women in paid employment spend on average upwards of 28 hours per week on housework, while the comparable figure for men is approximately 13 hours. In comparison with women, men spend more time on outdoor tasks while, for women, most time is spent on indoor activities Baxter (1993:80-81).

Dempsey (1992) in his Australian study of Smalltown writes:

> As a rule, men of all classes only help out with such tasks as washing or ironing if their wives are ill or away, and most Smalltown women do not make it a habit of absenting themselves....If, however, a wife is absent, husbands are frequently saved by the intervention of female relatives or friends who ensure that they do not have to prepare their main meal of the day or do their washing or ironing....In some instances, solo cooking for Smalltown men means getting a quick snack by, for example, heating a can of baked beans or by "shoving' in the oven a casserole the wife prepared before she went out" (Dempsey 1992:98-99).

In another Australian study, Bittman and Pixley (1997) write:

> Australian women, on the whole, are responsible for 'indoor' housework such as cooking, laundry, cleaning and physical care of children, while men are responsible for the 'outdoor' tasks like lawn, garden, pool and pet care, and for maintaining the car (Bittman and Pixley 1997:97).

Studies on child care show similar results. Even when women earn more than men, they work twice as many hours on child care than men. Employed women are more likely to stay at home when children are sick. Women spend more time on caretaking activities, while men are more likely to play with their children (Pleck 1985b; Brook 1985; Swiss 1993; Lerner 1994; Lobodzinska 1995). Other studies in Australia, United Kingdom and the United States show similar results (Thompson and Walker 1989; Delphy and Leonard 1992; Goodnow and Bowes 1994; Gregson and Lowe 1994).

Recent research conducted in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States and even Finland and Sweden (which attempted to institutionalise gender equality through government policy) indicates that men have started to increase their participation in only the easier and more pleasant child care tasks while they are least likely to share in tasks like changing nappies. Women look at child care as their primary duty whereas for men it tends to be a leisure activity (Horna 1989; Haas 1992; Dempsey 1992; 1997; Baxter 1993; Bittman and Pixley 1997). Dempsey (1992) writes:

> In Smalltown they seem to prefer the fun parts of child care - playing with the children or taking them to sport - rather than helping them with their home-work, or looking after them when they are sick (Dempsey 1992:100)

Research in India on the Domestic Division of Labour

In India, even when women work outside the home, they are typically regarded as merely 'secondary' or 'supportive' earners (Ramu 1989). According to Kapur (1974):

> ...most husbands consider household chores and caring for children to be the sole duty of the housewife even when both spouses have similar hours of paid employment. In other words, Indian men tend to feel that their duty is to earn an income and that carrying out domestic work, or even helping their wives with domestic work, is not part of their responsibility even when their wives share the responsibility of providing financially for the family (Kapur 1974:119).

Studies also show that most women in India have relatively low expectations of help from their husbands and consider household work as their responsibility. Housework is also seen as women's responsibility by other members of the family (Kapoor 1986; Sud 1991). Employed or not, Indian women like their Western counterparts in the developed countries, assume primary responsibility for household work. According to previous research, employment among women brings only a very marginal decrease in the proportion of domestic chores that they perform (Somjee 1989; Giri 1998).

Studies have shown that working women shoulder extra responsibilities like going to the shops, to the bank, attending children's school meetings, social visits and so on. For household chores and child care, they may get some help from servants and relatives but Indian men are still unwilling to help with household chores. (Srivastava 1986; U. Sharma 1986a; Raju and Bagchi 1993).

Housework is generally regarded as tedious and endless in a developing society like India where there is a scarcity of labour saving devices and day care centres. Sharing of work by family members, especially husbands and servants, is the only means available for lessening the burden of employed women.

Prior to and since Debi's 1988 study on Bengali women, little research has been conducted on the domestic arrangements of middle-class Bengali

women. One aim of the current study is to examine what changes have taken place since the mid-1970s. There are at least two reasons why we might expect to find changes over this period. First, married women's employment participation rates in West Bengal have increased since the 1970s from 4.4 per cent to 6.0 per cent in 1981 (Government of India 1981).[1] Second, attitudes to gender roles have become less conservative as a result of greater awareness of women's unequal position in society. Evidence of change includes a declining rate of arranged marriages, legal reforms to the practice of widow remarriage and changes in divorce, maintenance and inheritance rights.

Home and children still remain women's primary responsibilities. Despite arrangements that help ease their burden, employed women have to work at home in addition to any outdoor duties they undertake. Consequently, they have a much longer working day. The outside employment of women usually keeps them away from their homes during hours when women who are not employed can do the bulk of their housework. It is obvious that women who work outside the house for eight to ten hours a day may be unable to pay the same amount of attention to their homes as others can. Household arrangements to ease their burden may be inadequate.

The purpose of this chapter is to compare the domestic division of labour in households of employed middle-class Bengali women with those of middle-class non- employed Bengali women: how much time does each group of women spend on household tasks and child care? Are there differences in the amount/or kind of domestic labour performed by their husbands? It is also important to

[1] For West Bengal this was the latest figure available.

know how satisfied these women feel about such arrangements, and how their feelings affect life patterns within the household.

Methodology and Data Analysis

This chapter deals with two aspects of the domestic division of labour. First I will examine the amount of tasks performed by the respondents compared to other family members (relative task participation), and second, the nature of the division of labour: whether a traditional, medium or egalitarian division of labour exists in the household. Thus, I focus on three main research questions.

1. How does the employment of wives outside the home affect the distribution of tasks within the household?

2. How does the employment of wives outside the home affect the role of other members within the household?

3. How does the employment of wives outside the household affect the amount of time husbands and wives spend on household tasks?

The domestic division of labour is examined by asking about the performance of six household tasks which provide an index of the overall household division of labour:

1. Cooking
2. Cleaning up after meals
3. Grocery shopping
4. House cleaning
5. Ironing
6. House maintenance

The study shows that employed women try to maintain an equal commitment to both their roles and as a result end up spending more time than non-employed women on household chores. Some women expressed their dissatisfaction with these arrangements but still adhered to the notion that women are primarily responsible for housework. So even when women enter paid work, the assumption remains that they, not the men, will do all the work within the family. The changes in women's economic position do not appear to be an obstacle for the persistence of traditional family values. As is shown later in the in-depth interviews, most women express a preference not to give up family responsibilities despite the fact that they are working.

In my analysis of domestic work, a distinction is made between 'indoor household tasks' and 'outdoor household tasks'. 'Indoor household tasks' are those that are confined to the house, for example, cooking, cleaning up after meals, house cleaning and ironing. These tasks are more likely to be women's tasks than 'outdoor household tasks' such as grocery shopping and house maintenance, which are more likely to be men's tasks. Before independence in India there was a clear division between male and female roles. The female spent her youth preparing for marriage. Once married, her duty was to be a good wife and mother and tend to the needs of her husband. In return it was the duty of the husband to look after and protect his wife from all dangers. It was the husband who earned the money to support the family while the wife looked after the

home. Such a distinction is important because even today in India (Bengali society is no exception) grocery shopping and house maintenance[2] are male tasks.

This pattern is different from the Western one of traditional household work where, unlike in India, grocery shopping is also a responsibility of women. In India traditionally all 'outdoor household tasks' were allotted to men. This arrangement serves to restrict the movement of women outside the household.[3]

For the purpose of classifying the domestic division of labour within each individual household, I take two issues to be critically important. These are, first, the division of domestic labour between the different members of the household and, second, the time spent in performing these different types of household tasks. Thus, data on the domestic division of labour were collected by asking respondents to identify who performed the six household chores listed on page 117. Data on time spent on domestic labour were collected by asking how often these chores were performed and how much time was spent in performing them.

Responses to the former question were based on five categories. The lowest score of '1' was given to 'myself usually performs task', a score of '2' was given when the task was 'shared equally by the husband the wife', and the score of '3' was given when the task was being performed by 'husband usually'. The score of '4' was given when the task was performed by 'others' and '5' was given when the question was 'not applicable' in some households.

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[2] House maintenance in India means paying telephone and electric bills, small repairs like fencing, and arranging for workers. All major house maintenance is done by professional workers at cheap labour costs.

[3] In the Bengali culture putting restrictions on women's movement is quite common.

The responses to the four 'indoor household tasks' (cooking, cleaning up after meals, ironing and house cleaning) were summed to create a scale ranging from '4 to 12'. Items coded '4' and '5' were treated as missing data since my main focus is on the domestic division of labour between husbands and wives. I will refer to this scale as the 'indoor housework scale'. The two 'outdoor household tasks' (grocery shopping and house maintenance) were not included here because I am interested in finding out whether there have been any changes in the tasks defined as women's responsibility and whether more men are taking part in 'indoor household tasks' traditionally done by females.

The basic expectation is that employment brings about gender equality in the domestic life of women; that, as a consequence of paid employment, women are likely to become more independent and assertive, leading to changes in the division of labour within their household. Also, with employment outside the home we would expect women to do less household work. If these expectations are borne out by the evidence, then we would expect employed women to get higher scores on the 'indoor housework scale' than non-employed women. Such a score differential would suggest that employment has brought about some degree of gender equality in the domestic lives of middle-class Bengali women in Calcutta.

Time spent on household work is the second measure I use to assess differences between households in which women are in paid employment, and households in which women are full-time housewives. This measure is based on questions about the amount of time spent on household activities. In the results I present two measures: one based on the four 'indoor household tasks' and one

based on all the six household tasks. The totals are computed by summing the number of hours spent on each activity. For example:

Total indoor housework hours = cooking + cleaning up after meals + ironing + house cleaning

Total housework hours = cooking + cleaning up after meals + ironing + house cleaning + grocery shopping + house maintenance

Results

I begin by looking briefly at the division of labour on specific household tasks. Employed women still continue to do almost all the cooking, despite the fact that they are employed. It seems that women's employment has not altered the domestic division of labour in relation to cooking meals, possibly because culturally defined gender-based norms remain strong.

Table 5.1 Comparison of Employed and Non-Employed Women Reporting Responsibility for Cooking (column percentages)

Cooking	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Self	62	74
Self and husband equally	8	2
Husband	0	0
Others	30	24
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 2.6$; d.f = 2; $p < .26$

Table 5.1 shows that there is only a small difference between employed and non-employed women as far as preparing meals for the family is concerned.

Women, whether in paid employment or not, do the household cooking. The difference between employed women and non-employed women reporting responsibility of cooking is not statistically significant.[4] The table also shows that 30 per cent of employed women and 24 per cent of non-employed women do not have to do any cooking because they have other family members to do it.[5] Cooking is strictly regarded as 'female work' in Bengali society. Very few men participate in it. Thus, employed women carry the heaviest burdens. The few husbands who helped women with cooking participated in minor activities such as peeling and cutting vegetables, cleaning the rice or pulses or frying some snacks. Mrs. Chakravarty, aged 36, a junior research assistant in a government organisation said:

> Though I live in a joint family it has no effect on my work. I have to adjust to it according to need. It is an added responsibility and I have to work harder, be more tolerant and make sacrifices. I am expected to look after my husband and dependants. At home I do the bulk of the cooking despite the fact that I have a full-time paid job. And that is what not only my in-laws expect but also my husband expects the same. He thinks that my old mother-in-law can only do very light household tasks

For most women, cooking and serving two meals a day is their most important duty. [6] This work earns them respect and affection. However, the fact that they do it does not imply that they like cooking. Mrs. Nandi, aged 43, also

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[4] I had allowed for a category 'not applicable'. However, in this study it is not relevant as in all the houses of the respondents these household tasks were done at least a few times a week.

[5] In the in-depth interviews it became clearer that it was usually other family members and not servants who did the cooking in these households. Servants may have helped in the preparation of cooking such as cutting and peeling vegetables.

[6] A brunch and a dinner is cooked in all Bengali households every day.

employed for the past 13 years as a senior research fellow, commented:

> When I come back home from a full day's work I am exhausted but that does not matter to anyone at home. I immediately go to the kitchen to prepare the evening tea and snacks. Even though my husband comes home the same time as I do, he changes and either reads the newspaper or watches television. As soon as I am done with the evening tea I have to start thinking of what I am going to cook for dinner, and Indian cooking takes a long time. By the time I am out of the kitchen I am very tired. I think this is unfair to me.

But part of the deterrent to sharing cooking responsibilities is the fact that women themselves often discourage men from it, on the grounds that it is after all 'women's work' and men are not used to it. Mrs. Sen, aged 38 and non-employed, said:

> We ourselves do not like the idea of making our husbands work in the kitchen and being ridiculed as henpecked by their friends...my husband is so busy that I don't expect much from him as far as cooking goes. I feel that cooking is a task that comes to women naturally and so I try to do it myself. A man cannot be efficient in the kitchen as he has not been habituated to this sort of work before in his life. Even if he does try to do something he leaves the kitchen in a mess and I have to do all the cleaning later. So what is the point? It is not that by making dinner for the family one night he helps me to take complete rest. It only helps him to take pride and credit for what he has done. So I feel that I would rather do everything myself by making different arrangements; for example, when I am overworked I make adjustments by not cooking very fancy food. My husband and children are happy with this arrangement and so I do not expect my husband to carry on certain household duties. I would rather make alternative arrangements myself.

Table 5.2 Comparison of Employed and Non-Employed Women Reporting Responsibility for Cleaning up after Meals (column percentages)

Cleaning up after meals	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Self	48	64
Self and husband equally	6	0
Husband	2	0
Others	44	36
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 5.5$; d.f = 3; $p < .14$

Work in the kitchen does not finish with cooking food. After each meal there is cleaning to be done. Let us now see who does the majority of the cleaning after meals. As expected, the data on cleaning up after meals are not very different from the data on cooking. It is clear that women who do the cooking also do most of the cleaning up after meals. Like cooking, cleaning is considered a woman's job. There is no significant difference between employed and non-employed women as far as this task is concerned.

Table 5.2 shows that some women have others who do this task. For those living in joint families it may be done by relatives while those living in nuclear families have full-time or part-time servants to help with this work. The data for employed women show only a negligible difference from those for non-employed women.

One husband of an employed woman helped her in washing up after meals. About 44 per cent of employed women get help in washing up after

meals from others.[7] So far we have seen in Bengali households that male participation in household tasks is virtually non-existent. The only exception is grocery shopping. This is mainly because it has always been considered an 'outdoor household task' and not an 'indoor household task'. This convention is supported by the data presented in Table 5.3.

As mentioned earlier, non-employed women are more likely to be confined to tasks within the home. This pattern contrasts with Western practice, where the pattern is typically for women to take responsibility for grocery shopping. In India, the 'traditional' pattern was, and still is, for men to carry out this 'outdoor task'. As a result, more husbands of non-employed women do grocery shopping.

There has been a change in this pattern for employed women, with more of them doing grocery shopping. Thus, we can conclude that in society, grocery shopping and house maintenance are considered as 'male tasks' even today.[8] Traditionally grocery shopping was considered a 'male task' as it involved going out and coming in contact with other male members of the society and also dealing with shopkeepers and vegetable vendors, who were usually males.

[7] In India as in some other Asian cultures, a dimension of purity and pollution is associated with cooked food. As a result it is more common for housewives to do all the cooking and for servants to help them in washing up after meals.

[8] In former times it was more common for husbands or male servants to go to the *bazaar* (market) to buy groceries.

Table 5.3 Comparison of Employed and Non-Employed Women Reporting Responsibility for Grocery Shopping (column percentages)

Grocery shopping	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Self	20	12
Self and husband equally	30	14
Husband	36	66
Others	14	8
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 9.14$; d.f = 3; $p < .03$

As Table 5.3 shows, a larger percentage of men participate in grocery shopping than in food preparation and cleaning up. In fact, grocery shopping is the only activity in which men play a significant role. Also there is a significant difference ($p < .03$) between employed women and non-employed women reporting responsibility for grocery shopping, a difference that is statistically significant. Employed women do more grocery shopping than non-employed women. This may be because they go out every day and have greater access to shops and markets than non-employed wives. Employed women are also more likely to report that grocery shopping is shared equally with husbands. For these women, grocery shopping may be more a matter of convenience, and they decide with their husbands what items are required and who is going to buy them. In the case of non-employed women the majority report that husbands do the grocery shopping and daily marketing. Thus, some changes have taken place in the lives of Bengali employed women as far as 'outdoor household tasks' are concerned. But it seems that in this case the freedom to go out every day has led to an

additional responsibility for one household task: grocery shopping. Mrs. Choudhury, aged 26, non-employed said:

> There is no division of labour whatsoever between me and my husband as far as other household chores are concerned. But when it comes to grocery shopping my husband is all there. He is very fond of eating and hence enjoys buying all sorts of different types of food. When I think about it I feel well, that is also a big responsibility which he is willing to take. But sometimes I wish he would help me in the kitchen too. But as I am a full-time housewife with no children things are most of the time under control. I do occasionally get some help when absolutely necessary from his mother who is living with us.

Table 5.4 Comparison of Employed and Non-Employed Women Reporting Responsibility for House Cleaning (column percentages)

House cleaning	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Self	28	8
Self and husband equally	14	0
Husband	2	2
Others	56	90
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 16.51$; d.f = 3; $p < .05$

The data also suggest a difference between employed and non-employed women with regard to the task of house cleaning, a laborious task owing to the lack of domestic appliances. House cleaning is a task which employed women themselves do more than non-employed women and the data show that the difference is statistically significant at $p < .05$ level. Most non-employed women have someone, typically a servant, to do the house cleaning for them. On the other hand, contrary to what we might expect, though most employed women have servants, they do not have as many full-time servants as non-employed

women have to help them in house cleaning. While more employed women live in joint families and get help from other family members in child care, they do not usually get help from relatives with house cleaning.[9]

Unlike the families of non-employed women, employed women do their house cleaning in one block of time, usually during the weekend. However, because they do it themselves, they spend more time in house cleaning than non-employed women.

In the Bengali community, cleaning, like cooking, is considered women's work. Very few men help women to clean the house. Because 90 per cent of non-employed women have servants to help them with this task, none of their husbands do any house cleaning at all. On the other hand, more employed women do the house cleaning themselves and some of their husbands take some responsibility in helping to clean the house. One of the respondents, Mrs. Sen Gupta, aged 35, employed as an office administrator, commented:

> Frankly speaking it is my job that allows me to employ one part-time servant. The servant helps me in jobs like cleaning up after meals, cutting vegetables and so on. However that does not help me from not cleaning the house thoroughly at least once a week. Even though I live in a joint family the other older members refuse to help me in house cleaning as they consider it to be a dirty and time consuming work. That is when I feel that living in a joint family can actually increase one's household duties. My other family members never realise that with all the work inside and outside how difficult it is for me to do all the house cleaning too. Most men think that both cooking and cleaning are exclusively feminine chores and refuse to do them even if there is a necessity. I have also seen lots of other employed women (my colleagues) doing all the household cleaning on weekends. So practically speaking I don't think employment outside the home brings any major difference in the life patterns of women. Yes, I agree, that once you are employed you have the

[9] All the domestic servants were females.

money and if you want to make life easier you go and seek paid help outside the home.

Because employed women are more likely to live in joint families, in reality they end up doing more household work than their non-employed counterparts living in nuclear families.

Table 5.5 Comparison of Employed and Non-Employed Women Reporting Responsibility for Ironing (column percentages)

Ironing	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Self	20	20
Self and husband equally	12	4
Husband	10	8
Others	58	68
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 2.50$; d.f 3; $p < .473$

The supply of cheap female labour is more abundant in Calcutta than in any other metropolitan city in India. Unlike the case with house cleaning, more employed women than non-employed women share equally or get more help with ironing from their husbands. Working couples have to go out every day and may prefer to do their own ironing rather than send it to the *dhobi* (washerman). On the other hand, non-employed women seek the help of servants or the washerman for ironing. With regard to the task of ironing as a household task Mrs. Paul, aged 40, non-employed, said:

> Unlike employed women we housewives do not have to iron our clothes every day. It is only when we go out we have to think of ironing. I personally think ironing is strictly not included in our (housewives')

agenda of household work. In my family ironing is always done in bulk during the weekends and we usually give them to the washer man. If there is an emergency then my husband or daughters do their own ironing of one or two clothes which they will wear to work or college. When clothes are given to the washer man to be ironed it is basically my husband's or daughters' clothes. I give very few clothes for ironing as it is becoming quite expensive these days to have clothes ironed from outside.

As mentioned earlier, in Bengali society a distinction must be made between 'indoor household tasks' and 'outdoor household tasks'. The former are considered as a more female area of work whereas 'outdoor household tasks' are more a male dominated area of work. The data in Table 5.6 support this distinction.

Table 5.6 Comparison of Employed and Non-employed Women Reporting Responsibility for House Maintenance (column percentages)

House maintenance	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Self	16	10
Self and husband equally	14	6
Husband	44	24
Others	26	60
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 11.95$; d.f = 3; $p < .05$

Finally, in relation to house maintenance we find that 44 per cent of husbands of employed women and 24 per cent of non-employed women have responsibility for house maintenance. The difference between employed and non-employed women reporting responsibility for house maintenance in their families is statistically significant at $p < .05$.

In the households of non-employed women, it is usually the other members of the family or the servants who take care of house maintenance. Because employed women go out every day, this task is shared more equally between them and their husbands than is the case among non-employed women. As non-employed women adhere more to the traditional division of labour they have either male relatives or servants to look after 'outdoor household tasks'.

However, this significant difference comes about mainly because more non-employed women have someone else to take responsibility for house maintenance. Unlike ironing and other tasks, house maintenance is more diverse and responsibility is taken by different people at different times. So this task is often performed either by servants or *peons* (office attendants) in the case of non-employed women.

Many husbands of non-employed women are in higher paid jobs and have access to office attendants who are from time to time used for personal work like paying electric or telephone bills. Commenting on the task of house maintenance Mrs. Gupta, aged 29, employed as a clerk in a government organisation, said:

> I think my husband is a considerate man. But he can never understand what it means to do a double duty. So now I have made it very clear that there are certain outside jobs (like paying telephone bills) where he has to give a helping hand. It is not simply possible for me to look after the entire family, do all the cooking and other household chores and then queue up to pay telephone or electricity bills. He seems to have grudgingly after all accepted it. I am now free of this big responsibility.

Even though taking care of house maintenance is not done on a daily basis like cooking, in India it is quite time-consuming. Living in an over-

populated metropolitan city like Calcutta does not make things easy. As one respondent Mrs. Banerjee, non-employed aged 36, said:

> Though paying off electricity and telephone bills is done just once a month I must, however, admit it is a real problem. My friends whose husbands are high government officials have *peons* who take the responsibility of house maintenance (especially paying bills).

Table 5.7 Mean Distribution of Indoor Domestic Division of Labour Scale Between Husbands and Wives

Household tasks	Employed women (N=50)	Non-employed women (N=50)	F ratio
Cooking	7.38	6.84	2.44
Cleaning after meals	7.92	7.08	4.68#
House cleaning	8.76	8.94	.21
Ironing	9.66	9.24	.45
Total /4	8.43	8.03	3.11

# $p < .03$

Having looked at each of the household tasks independently I now turn to summary measures of the distribution of 'indoor domestic labour'. Table 5.7 reports means for each of the tasks as well as the mean score for the sum of all four indoor tasks. A low score indicates a traditional division of labour with wives doing the bulk of the work, while a high score indicates a more egalitarian division of labour. In each case the range is from '4 to 12'.

The results in Table 5.7 confirm the patterns reported for each specific task. There are some differences between the patterns of domestic lives of employed and non-employed women. But overall the results show that a traditional relationship persists between husbands and wives in middle-class

Bengali households as far as 'indoor household tasks' are concerned. Moreover, there is not much difference between employed and non-employed women in overall responsibility for domestic labour. Even though women are in paid work, they do not necessarily get more help from their husbands or other members of the family. This finding supports the findings of other studies conducted on Indian women (Rani 1976, Chakraborty 1978, Ramu 1989).

However, there are some differences between employed and non-employed middle-class Bengali women in household structure, which have implications for the domestic division of labour. Employed women are more likely than non-employed women to live in joint or extended families. They are therefore likely to spend more time on household tasks because they have larger families to care for.

In India obligations in family duties, especially towards a woman's in-laws, increase in a joint family. Nevertheless, most employed women prefer to live in joint families because they are then more likely to have close family members to look after their young children. Although in a joint family a woman may be relieved of some child care duties, at the same time she may spend more time on other household duties. The data suggest that paid work among Bengali women does not necessarily bring dramatic changes in the domestic division of labour between husbands and wives but rather affects the structure of the household, which in turn has an effect on the nature of the division of labour within the households.

Here, it is relevant to discuss the contribution of servants to the household chores in a Bengali household. Among the Indian urban middle-classes, cleaning,

especially washing dishes and mopping floors, is normally delegated to servants. Servants in these households are females and they work usually for several households, often coming every morning to do the dishes, sweep and clean the floor. In some households they also wash clothes, whereas in other households clothes are sent to the washerman. Live-in full-time servants also help with other tasks, but rarely with cooking.

Table 5.8 Distribution of Respondents With Domestic Servants

(column percentages)

Having servants	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Yes	96	100
No	4	0
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 2.04$; d.f = 1; $p < .15$

The distribution of respondents with servants is shown in Table 5.8. As expected, the table shows that almost all households have domestic servants, a common pattern in middle-class Indian households.

It was shown earlier in this study that most employed women live in extended or joint families, where they have other kin members to help them share the domestic responsibilities, especially child care. This tendency explains why two households did not have any servants. Some of the employed women had elderly kin who helped with domestic responsibilities.

In some joint families with unmarried sisters (usually of the husbands), it was common to seek domestic help from them, especially if they were not

employed. Many joint households in the sample had sisters-in-law and other relatives living in the same household. Because most were not employed they rendered domestic help, usually by looking after young children and also helping at times with other domestic tasks.[10] Another reason why employed women do not mind living in joint families is that, as they are away from home for most of the day, their chances of having conflicts with their in-laws are reduced. They are also confident that the house is secure while both spouses are away from home.

Table 5.9 Distribution of Respondents having Types of Domestic Servants (column percentages)

Types of servants	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (=50)
None	4	0
Part-time	16	10
Full-time	60	78
Both	20	12
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 4.86$; d.f = 3; $p < .18$

Full-time servants usually do most of the household work, including child care (discussed in detail later). Part-time servants do jobs like cleaning dishes, washing clothes, and cleaning the bathroom and toilet. Thus, part-time maid servants are employed to do the 'dirtier' household work. Employed women living in joint families do not hesitate to seek help from their in-laws rather than hiring full-time servants. Because they earn an independent income they can

[10] In Bengali society it is acceptable to ask for domestic help from female relatives like mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law but not from male kin, even though they may not be employed (see Standing 1991:71).

provide a better lifestyle to all their family members, including in-laws. As a result, they also have the authority to seek help. Thus, employed women get help from the family they are married into, especially for child care. On the other hand, non-employed women depend more on full-time servants for help in household tasks rather than asking for help from relatives and in-laws, even if they happen to live in joint families. However, despite the availability of domestic help the outside employment of women has not brought gender equality to their domestic lives. Most women in the sample still experienced a traditional sex-based division of labour. They did not expect their husbands to help them with household work but rather took on the extra burden themselves.

Time Spent on Domestic Work Per Week

So far the data reveal that there is little difference between employed and non-employed women in responsibility for household work. Even when women are in paid work, they do not necessarily get more help from their husbands or other members of the family. The fact that all the employed women were in full-time paid jobs did not make a difference to the division of household chores between husbands and wives. In fact, for four activities (grocery shopping, ironing, house maintenance and house cleaning) the percentage of employed women performing these tasks was actually higher than among non-employed women.

It is not enough, however, simply to establish the fact that employed women's participation in household chores is similar (in certain household tasks it is higher) to that of non-employed women. In order to establish whether

employment has brought about any difference in the life patterns of employed women with regard to household work, it is also important to find out how much time both employed and non-employed middle-class Bengali women spend on household activities. It may be that employment brings no change to the distribution of tasks between husbands and wives, but it may lead to changes in the amount of time that women spend on housework. If women have less time available to do housework, it is reasonable to expect that they will devote less time to it. Even if men do not increase the number of tasks they perform, the gender gap between the time spent by husbands and wives on housework may narrow.

Table 5.10 Mean Hours Spent Per Week by Employed Women and Non-Employed Women on Household Tasks

Household tasks	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)	F ratio
Cooking meals	14.08	14.78	.09
Cleaning up after meals	3.19	3.30	.02
Ironing	0.84	0.55	1.14
House cleaning	2.43	0.58	7.83*
Total of indoor tasks	20.54	19.21	.23
Grocery shopping	2.36	0.58	10.53*
House maintenance	0.89	0.41	2.01
Overall total	23.79	20.20	1.59

* $p < .05$

Table 5.10 reports the mean hours per week spent by employed and non-employed women on each of the six household tasks included in the

questionnaire. The overall difference in the total time spent by the two groups is not significant. The table shows that employed women in total spend *more* time than non-employed women on household tasks, with two exceptions: cooking and cleaning up after meals. Of the other four tasks two are considered as 'outdoor' household tasks. Employed women spend *more* time on these tasks. Because employed women go out every day, it is more convenient for them than for non-employed women to share these tasks or even to do them alone. The mean difference between employed and non-employed women's time spent on the total number of tasks is not statistically significant. For both groups of women the most time consuming task is cooking meals (over 14 hours per week), followed by cleaning up after meals (over 3 hours) and house cleaning, especially for employed women. Tests of pair-wise comparisons and a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) show that the difference between employed and non-employed women in total hours of grocery shopping and house cleaning per week is statistically significant (significant at $p < .05$).

How do we explain these patterns? Since employed women tend to live in joint families they also tend to live in larger houses. Cleaning the house becomes a substantial commitment. This factor may help to explain why employed women spend more time than non-employed women on household work. Despite the fact that these women are in full-time jobs, within the family they remain primarily responsible for domestic work, regardless of any benefits paid work might bring. The total number of hours spent each week on domestic chores indicates that women's employment has had little effect on the amount of time devoted to domestic work. Employed women spend an average of 40-45 hours per week on

their paid job (not including the time spent in commuting), in addition to about 24 hours of housework per week. In contrast non-employed women spend a total of only 20 hours on housework.

From these results we can safely conclude that women continue to take the major responsibility for all household chores. A traditional relationship exists between husbands and wives irrespective of women's economic status. We find a negligible difference between employed and non-employed women in their domestic relationships with their husbands. Even this small difference may occur not because employed women get more help from their husbands but simply because employed women spend less time at home. Household arrangements among non-employed women remain traditional for both 'outdoor' and 'indoor' household tasks. As for employed women, because they have outside access they involve themselves more in 'outdoor' household tasks. This change has more negative than positive effects because their responsibility for 'indoor' household tasks is not reduced by sharing it with husbands. As a result they end up doing *more* household work.

Is Housework a Woman's Duty?

The previous section showed that the division of domestic work is highly sex-segregated. How do women feel about this division? The women in this study were asked whether they wanted more help from their husbands in household work. The women were also asked how satisfied they were with the help they got from their husbands in these domestic chores.

Table 5.11 Do You Think Your Husband Could Help You More in Household Duties? (column percentages)

More help	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=49)
Yes	30	10
No	70	88
Missing	0	2
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 7.02$; d.f = 2; $p < .02$
Note: one non-employed woman did not answer this question.

Table 5.11 shows that 30 per cent of employed women want more help from their husbands in domestic chores compared to 10 per cent of non-employed women. Because employed women have full-time jobs they want their husbands to help them more with domestic work. However, very few non-employed women made this claim formally. The difference on this issue is statistically significant at $p < .02$ level.[11] Mrs. Saha, aged 30, employed as an office administrator said:

> I quite like the idea of keeping the house neat and tidy. And I devote a lot of time to looking after my daughter. I like cooking good food for my family. However, to be honest sometimes I wish my husband would be more appreciative of all that I do for the family and acknowledge the fact that it is indeed a tough job to be a good mother, good wife and a good worker. What I don't like is the fact that he tends to take me for granted and makes me feel that domestic chores are a woman's work and her duty and that it should be accepted by her without making a big thing out of it.

[11] In Bengali society a neatly kept house or a dinner well appreciated by guests gives a sense of pride to women as the comments made by one respondent show.

Table 5.12 How Satisfied Are You With The Division of Household Work Between You and Your Husband? (column percentages)

Satisfaction	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=49)
Very satisfied	54	54
Satisfied	34	36
Dissatisfied	12	8
Missing	0	2
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 1.42$; d.f = 3; $p < .69$
One non-employed woman did not answer this question.

Despite the fact that very few husbands actively help their wives in household chores, most women (both employed and non-employed) are satisfied with the help that they get from their husbands. Only 12 per cent of employed women and 8 per cent of non-employed women expressed dissatisfaction. As one respondent Mrs. Chatterjee non-employed, aged 44, said:

> I would like my husband to help me more in domestic work as he does not do very much around the house. Though I am not always satisfied with whatever little work he does. I have reconciled with the fact that, whether a woman works or not, the domestic chores are her responsibility. What is the point in making a big thing out of it and have misunderstandings every day?

Though women are sometimes not satisfied with the help that they get from their husbands, they are willing to compromise and usually remain passively loyal to their husbands rather than voicing their dissatisfaction or leaving the relationship. England and Kilbourne (1990) observe that in developed countries women's increasing entry into paid employment and their economic independence give them the confidence to leave a marriage if they are not

satisfied. However, this option is less applicable in India because of the very nature of its social structure.[12]

Despite the fact that there are servants in the households of these women, the average number of hours spent on household chores by employed and non-employed women is almost the same. In Bengali society great responsibility is put on women when it comes to cooking and preparing food. Similar statements are made by Standing: '...servants are rarely left to work without supervision and women spend a lot of time "managing" their work. Menus and marketing have to be organized, usually by the senior women' (1991:71-72). For example I found that full-time servants are not allowed to prepare the two major meals or to decide the menus. This is usually done by wives with the assistance of servants. As we have already seen, the dirtier work of the house is usually relegated to them. Even so women, employed or not, spend much the same amount of time on household chores.

Child Care within the Household

Household work cannot be understood without taking child care into consideration. The absence of appropriate arrangements for looking after the children of employed women is a major problem in Indian society. When a mother wishes to take up employment outside the home, the care of children, especially infants, can become a significant problem if there is no other female in

[12] In India single women living alone usually find it difficult to rent living accommodation as landlords prefer married women living with husbands and children. Socially, they face the prospect of being ostracized. If employed, single women may often be taken advantage of by male bosses or colleagues. If not employed and economically dependent, they may be harassed by their family and relatives.

the household. As a result, many women in this sample had to leave their young children at home in the care of relatives or untrained maid servants.[13]

We shall see that employed women spend more-or-less the same time as non-employed women on child care tasks, despite the fact that the former have younger children needing constant supervision and care. More employed women choose to live in joint families where they can get help from older female members of the family in looking after them. This study reports data on child care for respondents having children only under the age of ten living at home, because only those women were asked about child care. The survey had questions relating to four main child care tasks:

1. Feeding children
2. Bathing children
3. Getting children to bed
4. Helping children with homework

Out of the total number of 100 women in the sample 13 women did not have any children.[14] More employed women than non-employed women had children below the age of ten. The latter had children in age groups not needing any child care, as well as adolescents studying in universities or even employed.

The primary responsibility for child care lies with the mother and she spends most time on it. However, I wanted to establish whether other household

[13] Keeping an *ayah* (trained nanny) has become very expensive. Most middle-class Bengali families these days have ordinary maidservants to take care of children.

[14] Of the two groups 12 employed women did not have children below the age of 10 and 23 non-employed women did not have children under the age of 10 living at home; 8 employed women were childless and 5 non-employed women had no children.

members spent time with children and how this pattern varied between the two groups of women in my sample. Such a comparison should indicate whether there have been any changes due to employment in the family lives of women as far as these duties are concerned.

Thus, the purpose of this section of the study is not to identify any differences in behaviour of the children of employed and non-employed women but rather to establish whether there is a difference in gender equality in the families of these two groups of women with regard to child care. Almost all women made arrangements for their children to be cared for by full-time servants or relatives in their absence. Employed women living in joint and extended families had family members to look after their children.

Table 5.13 Who Spends Most Time on Child Care Tasks?

(column percentages)

Who spends most time	Employed women (N=30)	Non-employed women (N=22)
Self	77	96
Husband	0	4
Others	23	0
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 7.03$; d.f = 2; $p < .02$

Table 5.13 shows the distribution of responses to this question. Employed women spend less time than non-employed women in child care as they have more family members to help them look after their children.

Table 5.14 Distribution of Child Care in Respondent's Absence (column percentages) [a]

Child carer	Employed women (N=30)	Non-Employed women (N=22)
Husband	7	41
Servant	33	5
Relations	50	41
Left alone	0	9
Child care	10	0
Nothing regular	0	5
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 18.52$; d.f = 5; $p < .002$

a Figures may not add up to 100 due to rounding errors

Table 5.14 shows that, even in the absence of the mother, some children are looked after by their fathers. Because more employed women live in joint families or can afford full-time servants to look after their children, they get very little help from their husbands in child care.[15] Living in a joint family is very helpful for employed women as they have family members (especially in-laws) to provide help in child care. Child care facilities outside the home are rare and expensive. Only dual-earner households can afford to send their children out to child care.

In a Bengali household non-employed female in-laws are usually responsible for child care arrangements. In extended families, mothers of the respondents are also involved with other relatives or servants in this task. Mrs. Adhikari, aged 41, employed as a telephone operator with two children aged 9

[15] For employed women full-time servants help more with child care, while for non-employed women full-time servants help more with household chores.

and 6 years, stated:

> My mother lives with me and as I am employed full-time she looks after my children in my absence. I don't know what I would have done without her help. It is only because of her that I am able to continue with my job. My husband is very reluctant to lend a helping hand in personal child care tasks like bathing, changing nappies and feeding. Most of the time he tends to shirk these tasks on very flimsy grounds like he has to do overtime, or he is not very competent in doing these messy tasks and so on. I can clearly see that these are just excuses, for he does not mind playing with the children or helping them do their homework. When I compare my domestic life with my friends who are not in paid jobs I don't think there has been any dramatic change in my life because of my paid employment.

It is evident that women's employment has little effect on the personal aspects of child care. Most husbands do not share with women what may be defined as primary aspects of child rearing, that is, personal care like bathing, feeding and changing nappies. Among non-employed women husbands look after their children in the absence of their wives only on rare occasions when there is an urgent need. Because non-employed women very rarely go out by themselves, the need for child care does not often arise. Mrs. Purkayastha, aged 39, non-employed, remarked:

> Do you ever think he (my husband) would have done child-care if it was an everyday affair? No way. It is because of this problem of looking after my daughter that I had to quit my job after working for 12 years. It was expected of me to do so because I am a woman and more so because I became a mother. Most Indian men, no matter how liberated they are in their outlook, believe in the gender-based division of household labour. Whether one is employed or not they think that women because of their sex are naturally more competent in doing domestic chores than men. I have seen my own husband having this attitude. I am saying this both from experience of being an employed and a non-employed woman.

In order to find out more about such arrangements in the qualitative interviews mothers were asked how they felt about the arrangements they made for looking after their children in their absence. The responses varied. Some said that they were more satisfied when close female relatives like mothers or mothers-in-law took care of their children. Employed women had no choice and some of them had to hire servants to do this task. They tended to overlook any incompetence on the part of servants as long as it did not have any adverse effect on the children. Mrs. Acharya, aged 34, employed as a research assistant, claimed:

> Much as I would like to look after my son who is about 3 years it is just next to impossible. It is very difficult for me to leave my child at the mercy of the servant. I feel guilty of depriving him of the motherly attention and love which is so important for him during these growing years. I am lucky enough to have a full-time servant who is reliable enough. I don't know what I would have done if this help was not available. It is not that I am totally happy with her service but I try to avoid or overlook negligible incompetence on her part. In this day and age I am convinced that I will not find someone better than her.

At the same time, however, Table 5.15 shows that even when there were problems in looking after their children in their absence, most women did not want more help from their husbands with child care. However, more employed than non-employed women want more help from their husbands in looking after their children.

Table 5.15 Do You Think Your Husband Could Help You More With Child Care Duties? (column percentages) [a]

Seeking more help	Employed women (N=30)	Non-Employed women (N=22)
Yes	43	23
No	53	73
Missing	3	5
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 2.38$; d.f = 2; $p < .30$

a. Figures may not add up to 100 due to rounding errors

Table 5.16 Distribution of Respondents Satisfaction with their Husband's Help in Child Care (column percentages)

Satisfaction	Employed women (N=30)	Non-Employed women (N=22)
Satisfied	77	77
Dissatisfied	20	18
Missing	3	5
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = .07$; d.f = 2; $p < .96$

Despite the fact that employed women want more help from their husbands in child care compared to non-employed women, there is no significant difference between employed and non-employed women in satisfaction with their husband's help in child care.

This lack of difference may be because employed women feel guilty for not spending more time with their children. They may feel that their children are being deprived of their care and love because of their employment outside the home. As a result, they tend to be satisfied with whatever help they can get. Other reasons for women, both employed and non-employed, claiming that they were

satisfied with their husband's help in child care emerge from the qualitative interviews. Mrs Nandi, aged 43 and employed, said:

> Though I am an employed woman I do not think it is a good idea to express dissatisfaction against one's husband because I think that is the root cause of many marital conflicts. Even if one is employed the idea of having a divorce or a separation in our country is not a very wise thing to do. In India there are many problems associated in being single. [Q. Like what?] At the work place single women become the focus of gossip and male attention. Often they are considered as women with loose character and easily available. Within the family they are either ridiculed or pitied.

Living in joint families also gives employed women more security in child care. But the result is that they have low expectations of their husbands. They are sympathetic and understand their husbands' lack of time due to their job demands.

On the other hand, non-employed women have less understanding of the nature of paid work. According to them, work in the kitchen and the house is never-ending. There are no rewards for housework in India, and its value is not recognised. As a result non-employed women are less satisfied with the help they get from their husbands. They feel that they should get more help despite the fact that their husbands are employed full-time.

As most non-employed women live in nuclear families, they have to seek help from domestic servants for child care but would prefer more help from their husbands. Mrs. Sanyal, aged 35, non-employed with two school going daughters, commented:

> Just because I am a full-time housewife does not mean that I have all the time in the world but that is what people think, including my husband. I must tell you being a housewife is more demanding because people start

expecting more from you. And the more you do the more they want. Employed women can at least escape the household chores for a few hours. There is a variety in their lives. They meet different people, do work which is different from the mundane household work. I think housework is boring and never-ending. My day-to-day routine starts around 6 a.m. First of all I have a shower and do my *puja,*[16] soon I rush to the kitchen to prepare breakfast for my children and husband. As my children take packed lunches from home I have to make something different. By the time I finish with all these chores the maid comes to wash the clothes so I have to organise everything for her as she is always in a hurry. By the time she leaves I am on my feet again to prepare something for lunch as my husband comes home for lunch. After he leaves I have my lunch and then I relax for an hour or so. This is the only time I have to myself. Around 4 p.m. my children come back from school hungry so I make evening tea for my children. While I am doing this my husband gets back from work too. As you know, in Bengali households we have late dinners and so evening tea is very common. It is then dinner time which takes another 2-3 hours by the time I finish up. Despite all this my husband thinks I have an easy life. I want him to stay home one whole day and do all the work that I do. I am sure he will change his mind. All that my husband does as far as household chores are concerned is to do grocery shopping just once a week. I think that is not at all enough and I hope he would realise that.

Time Spent on Child Care Per Week

Time spent on child care each week is extensive, especially for women in employment. Specifically, employed women living in nuclear families with children under school age must organise full-time child care facilities whereas employed women with school-age children require less help (children in India spend 6 to 7 hours at school each day). Women who work irregular hours have

[16] Daily prayer which includes offerings of flowers and fruits.

particular problems in finding suitable child care.[17]

Table 5.17 Mean Hours Spent Per Week by Employed and Non-Employed Women on Child Care (column percentages)

Child care tasks	Employed women (N=30)	Non-Employed women (N=22)	F ratio
Dressing children	1.56	0.89	2.87#
Feeding children	5.81	3.76	1.72
Getting children to bed	1.43	0.52	5.34*
Help with homework	6.65	4.13	2.45
Total	15.45	9.03	4.22+

* $p < .02$
# $p < .09$
+ $p < .04$

Table 5.17 shows the mean hours per week spent by employed and non-employed women on child care tasks. It is interesting to note that there is not much difference between the two groups of women on the time spent on child care. In total, employed women end up spending on average *more* time in child care than non-employed women. The most important reason for this is that, on average, more employed women in this sample have young children needing assistance in the first three child care tasks like dressing children, feeding them, and getting them to bed. Employed women have more children under school age than do non-employed women.

Following this logic, we would expect employed women to spend less time than non-employed women on helping children with homework. However,

[17] In my sample I had 21 women who worked irregular hours as technical assistants in the Department of Telephone Exchange and Calcutta *Doordarshan* (Television Broadcasting).

that the data show that employed women spend *more* time than non-employed women in helping children with their homework. Employed women tend to be more educated and to take a greater interest in the education of their children. At the same time, their husbands and other family members rely on them more in the education of their children. This view is supported by the following comment by Mrs. Dhar, aged 31, who is employed as a computer analyst:

> The education of my daughter is my sole responsibility. Though my husband is a qualified medical doctor he hardly takes any responsibility for my daughter. I don't expect anything much from him as far as other child care tasks are concerned as he is very busy with his work. But I wish he was more considerate as far as her studies go. It is my responsibility to look after all her school matters like to pay her fees, buy all the study material, help her with her homework and so on. Even the fact that I am employed does not change things very much within the domestic arena. I am quite sure I end up spending more time in looking after my child than my non-employed friends. The reality is that middle-class employed women are tossed between work and family demands. It is true that in Bengali society the demands of husbands, children and relations receive priority.

Women's Employment and Marital Relationship

Although paid work keeps women busy and gives them an independent income, it may also result in marital tension and affect the relationship of women with their children. Out of a total of 50 employed women, 13 women feel that their relationship with their husbands has been affected, positively or negatively, by their paid employment, while 21 think that their relationship with their children has been affected.[18] The remaining employed women feel that their

[18] This question was not applicable to 8 employed women as they were childless.

employment has had no effect on their relationship with their husbands or children.

The data also reveal that employed mothers living in joint families were less likely to report 'no effects' or 'positive effects' in comparison to employed mothers in nuclear families. This difference arose mainly because in joint families they had some family members to take care of children in their absence, whereas this opportunity was not available to employed mothers living in nuclear families. The study also shows that employed mothers are the first ones to admit that, because of their work outside the home, children may be neglected. Mrs. Saha, aged 30 employed as a researcher, who lives in a nuclear family, said:

> I have a daughter who is 4 years old and is now going to school. While she is at school I am at peace of mind and can do some work. But soon after school hours my tension starts. She takes the school bus to get back to my parents' place who look after her until I come back from work to fetch her. As my place of work is very far away it takes me over an hour to do so. My parents are getting old and I do not like at all to burden them with this responsibility but there is no other choice. My husband does not help me at all in any household or child care task and this has been causing a lot of tension in our marriage. I constantly feel guilty of not spending enough time with my daughter during these growing years. I feel I am being responsible for depriving my daughter of my love and attention. At the same time I cannot give up this job as I desperately need it.

This illustration shows that, despite their best efforts, it is extremely difficult for employed mothers to cope with their dual roles and be successful workers and mothers/ wives, especially without the help and co-operation of their husbands. Women tend to feel responsible for any of their children's problems, like misbehaviour, failure to do well in school, and sickness, mainly because they are unable to spend enough time with them. The situation is somewhat better in

joint families. Mrs. Bagchi, age 32, employed as a translator in a government organisation, commented:

> I think because I live in a joint family my daughter is better looked after than she would be otherwise. She is just about 2 years old and has to be under constant supervision. I think my relatives do a moderately good job but as a mother I am never satisfied completely. I feel very guilty too of not spending enough time with her. However, I don't have to worry about other things like whether my daughter is being fed when she is hungry or is sleeping at the right time or is being cleaned and changed when required. When you have a servant to do all these tasks they are often not done properly. That is what I hear from my colleagues who depend on paid help.

It is clear that inability to look after their children and spend time with them is the major negative effect of women's employment on their relationship with their children. The most tension is experienced by women who have to leave very young children at home in the care of untrained maidservants. They report that their concentration at work is greatly disturbed. Living in joint families proves an advantage for some employed women as far as child care is concerned. Irrespective of what arrangement is made to look after their children, no respondents are completely satisfied with the time spent with their children.

To sum up, employed women still continue to do almost all the routine housework despite the fact that they are employed full-time. Women's employment does not alter sex-role perceptions mainly because of the strength of culturally defined gender -based norms. Ramu's explanation of the traditional sex-role perceptions among employed couples in India is that both men and women continue to be governed by traditional beliefs and values which

'encourage wives to acknowledge and defer to their husbands even though they share the provider role' (Ramu 1989:13).

In a Bengali household, even if there is a division of labour in domestic chores, it is between female members (in joint or extended households) or between female members and domestic servants. There is seldom sharing between male members and female members.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that, in comparison to non-employed women, employed women participate more in outside work like grocery shopping and house maintenance. Ironing and cleaning the house are other tasks where employed women participate more than non-employed women. On the other hand, non-employed women participate more in household tasks confined within the household, like cooking and cleaning up after meals. With respect to these two tasks, employed wives receive slightly more help than non- employed wives. However, both responsibilities remain predominantly the domain of women.

Overall, employed women with young children spend the most time on paid and unpaid work compared to other groups of women. Non-employed women with young children spend less time on domestic work than any category of employed women. On average employed women spend about 24 hours per week on household chores in addition to around 45 hours per week on paid work.

Another interesting finding is that employed women spend more time than non-employed women on child care tasks. The most important reason for this is that in my sample employed women have younger children who need

assistance. Thus, the age of children is an important factor determining the amount of time a woman spends on child care tasks. The data clearly show that a very traditional division of child care tasks continues to exist in these families, notwithstanding the employment of women full-time outside the home.

The most important conclusion from this chapter concerns the way in which the structure of the household affects the domestic division of labour in Bengali households. Whatever support and co-operation are available to women is not guaranteed but depends on family circumstances. Women living in joint families receive more help in child care though not necessarily in other household tasks. On the other hand women in nuclear families have the major responsibility for both household tasks and child care.

The data presented so far suggest that not much has changed in the domestic sphere of Bengali society. Middle-class Bengali women remain responsible for most household tasks, including child care. There is a clear gender division of labour little affected by the growth of female employment. Women remain locked into a traditional gender-based division of labour. Because their husbands rarely help with household work, they assume the extra burden themselves or try to find help from relatives or servants. These findings differ somewhat from studies conducted in Western societies, because people in the West mostly live in nuclear families irrespective of whether they are in paid employment or not. Moreover, the definition of household tasks as 'male' and 'female' differs in Western societies compared to India. Finally, in India, the middle class have access to regular paid servants whereas most families in the

West do not. The next research question is how outside employment affects decision-making within the middle-class family in Bengali society.

CHAPTER 6

POWER AND AUTHORITY WITHIN THE HOUSEHOLD IN INDIA

Introduction

Sociological research on the status of Indian women suggests that they enjoy very little autonomy within households because family decisions relating to finances, marriage, employment and education are predominantly made by men. Women are rarely consulted (Kumar 1991; Das and Kumar 1995). The patrilineal kinship structure and inheritance and marriage systems do not give Indian women autonomy within the family (Dube, et al. 1986; Jain 1994). Authority and decision-making within the family theoretically follow the male side of the kin network.

According to Basham (1963), the head of the household in classical times was considered to be the ultimate authority in the household, as well as the manager of the family unit. As Basham stated, 'the father was the head of the house and administrator of the joint property' (Basham 1963:155). This chapter examines the extent to which this pattern is still dominant.

One of the important consequences of middle-class women's entry into paid employment outside the home may be a change in the relationships among the different members of the family and the development of a new pattern of interpersonal relationships within the family. This change may be reflected in the

amount of power and authority they exercise in the decision-making processes of the family.

This chapter examines the effect of women's employment on decision-making within the family. I use decision-making as indicative of power and authority within the family although it is clearly only one aspect of family power. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section deals with the conceptual framework adopted to study decision-making. The second section presents an analysis of the decision-making process among employed and non-employed middle-class Bengali women in the sample. The power of wives relative to their husbands and the extent to which decisions are made individually or jointly are measured and related to various demographic and social variables such as age, fertility, education, family type, income and work position.

Power within the Household

Since the early 1960s there has been increasing interest among family sociologists in explaining power within the family. The first major work in the area of decision-making within the family was by Blood and Wolfe (1960) and their work is still quite influential today. It is generally agreed that power is multidimensional and that family members do not have the same power in all areas (Rothschild 1970; Huber 1993).

Despite this interest, research in this area has been plagued by conceptual and methodological weaknesses. Firstly, there is the problem that respondents are likely to be biased in their reports because of their involvement in the decision-making process. Secondly, if decision-making is taken as the basis for an analysis

of power, various types of decisions carry different weights. The other problem is that decision-making is only one aspect of power and ignores other kinds of power, such as who defines the decision-making agenda, and the implicit power that husbands have by virtue of patriarchal relations.

In the American and English literature the unit in which this process takes place is the nuclear family. This model is not applicable to the Indian context because of the more complex nature of Indian families. In an Indian setting joint families are common. So in this chapter I study the decision-making relationship not only between husbands and wives but also with other members of the family. Models which focus only on husbands and wives are flawed by the neglect of other relationships that may be important.

While there are many problems with using decision-making as an indicator of power, there is also a long sociological tradition of focusing on it (Rothschild 1970; Oppong 1970; Fox 1973; Miller 1984; Szinovacz 1987; Edgar and Glezer 1994). To date no work on decision-making among employed and non-employed Bengali women has been published. Power is a multidimensional concept and decision-making is only one aspect of power. Power is obviously more complex but in this study I use decision-making as an empirical indicator of power.

Decision-making as an overt expression of power has traditionally been regarded as a central dimension of family power (Walby 1990). It is a critical element for the status of family members because it involves the allocation of resources and the distribution of roles within the family. In order to evaluate the contemporary pattern of power in the families of employed and non-employed

women, it is essential to assess the various aspects of the family-decision-making process (Scanzoni 1979; Phal 1989). In this study the role of the women in decision-making on various family matters is taken as indicative of their power and authority, notwithstanding conceptual and methodological problems in the measurement of decision-making (McDonald 1980; Lerner 1994). As Rothschild (1970) stated:

> It seems that theories about power structure will not become more sophisticated and valid, until the methodology of power structure studies improves considerably to include the detailed study of all aspects of power from the point of view of all contributing family members as well as the study of underlying differential degrees of affective involvement of one family member in the other as important variables (Rothschild 1970:549).

Scanzoni (1979) has observed that most research has focused on either power bases or power outcomes. As a result there are gaps in knowledge about family power processes. Other problems with decision-making studies are that scales used in this type of study have often combined trivial day-to-day decisions, such as what to eat for dinner with major but infrequent issues like whether to move to another city (Rothschild 1970). As a result, studies of the relationship between women's employment and decision-making report mixed results. For example Szinovasc's (1987) study in Austria, employment outside the home does not necessarily lead to more egalitarian relationships in the households of employed women.

In India, where tradition is deeply rooted in the socio-cultural history of the country, cultural variations affect the distribution of power within the

household. It has been shown that 'husbands in joint families have more power than husbands living apart from their lineal kin' (Straus 1975:147).

Because of the cultural diversity between different regions that governs husband-wife relations in India, the problem of measuring decision-making is complex. Though joint decisions on different matters may often suggest that women and men relate to each other as equals, in reality the husbands usually have greater influence and make the final decision. It must be acknowledged that actual or perceived decision-making on family matters is only one dimension of the larger issue of power.

The issue of equality involves complex questions of authority or ideology, role allocation, and delegation of responsibilities. The distribution of decision-making in marriage is only one specific element in the larger paradigm needed to fully grasp the dynamics and structure of power. To minimise the problem I also looked at autonomy at work as this may affect the nature of power within the household. According to Jeffery and Jeffery (1997),

> ...household dynamics are still remarkably little understood: households are fairly opaque, and studying how their members make decisions has not yet been very fruitful. We do know, however, that decisions are very rarely 'made' in a straightforward way and on a specific occasion. They emerge out of series of interactions, over a period of time, and may be subsequently refined and amended (Jeffery and Jeffery 1997:123).

Another important aspect of power is financial power. The decision-making power of women can be measured more accurately if they have the liberty to spend their own or family income. Thus, decision-making is a complex

issue involving many factors and may be affected in various ways through the structure of the family and its relationship to the wider society.

Research on Decision-Making Power in Indian Families

The study of decision-making power within the family and the power relationships associated with them have recently been gaining interest among scholars studying marriage and the family in India. However, few such studies compare decision-making power in the families of employed and non-employed women. A systematic study of these issues is yet to be undertaken. Relatively little work has been done to develop more adequate indicators of the dimensions of decision-making power within middle-class Bengali households.

The small amount of work on Indian women and their families shows that even today decisions about the family budget and whether or not wives take paid employment rest primarily with the husband. One interesting feature of autonomy of women within the households in India is that, because women are in close contact with their children, they are generally responsible for making day-to-day children-centred decisions. However, important decisions concerning children are usually made by men.

Most researchers of Indian family life have neglected the dynamic aspects of family, especially relative autonomy and the distribution of power within families (Mahadevan 1984; Dixit 1998). The contemporary Indian family is not insulated from changes brought about by education and urbanisation, which in turn have brought about a subtle transition in values, norms and roles related to the family. Such changes are more pronounced in urban than rural families. In

India there are strong cultural differences between regions, and in India, as elsewhere, cultural norms define power and decision-making in the family. A few studies have shown that joint family residence in India has an effect on the decision-making power of women (Jain 1988a; Mishra and Singh 1992). However, studies on women in other parts of India cannot easily be generalised to Bengali women.

In Bengal the traditional sex role pattern in the family was typically male or father-dominant (Roy 1975; Prasad 1990). But recent studies have indicated some shift from this tradition in the direction of equal statuses for wife and husband. Furthermore, these studies conclude that the proportion of families in which both husband and wife share family and child-rearing decisions is gradually increasing, especially in urban areas. In rural areas male dominance is still very strong (Bjorkman 1986; Parthasarathy 1988; Jain 1994). In Indian society most families are characterised by an idealised norm of male superiority (Ross 1961; Rao and Rao 1982; Mittal 1995). Values and norms reinforce inequality between men and women in general, and husbands and wives in particular. These values and norms are derived from cultural assumptions about masculinity and femininity and continue to be inculcated with varying degrees of effectiveness through socialisation.

The growth of nuclear households in India would be expected to increase the power of the wife (Straus and Winkelmann 1969; Straus 1975; Gulati 1995). In measuring power relations within the family among different groups, little has been done to explore the relationships between the nuclear unit and the larger kinship group. With joint residence there are more decision makers under one

roof, and decision-making powers tend to be more diffused than they would be otherwise. Living in a joint household decreases the power of the wife on internal decisions (Madan 1976; Rao and Rao 1982; Dube 1988; Gupta and Mittal 1995).

However, in Devi's (1982) study there is no correlation between type of family and women's levels of decision-making.

On the other hand, legal reforms, emerging egalitarian values, and changing economic conditions have undermined the traditional status of women in marriage and the family and moved some way toward eroding male dominance. Wives in dual-career families may have greater decision-making power than wives in single-career families. Middle-class women in India also have greater access to education and thus have greater exposure to 'modern' egalitarian norms (Chaudhary 1995). They are therefore more likely to have an egalitarian relationship than lower-class women among whom traditional patriarchal norms may remain unchanged.

Methodology and Data Analysis

This chapter examines whether there are any differences between employed and non-employed women in any specific area of decision-making; and whether employed women play a greater role in financial decisions than non-employed women.

In studying the relationship between husbands and wives I make a distinction between 'family power' and 'conjugal power'. In 'family power' the child's role is also taken into consideration whereas in 'conjugal power' only the

interaction between husbands and wives is studied. My study is restricted to 'conjugal power' within middle-class Bengali families.

The study is confined to areas of decision-making considered relevant to the Indian context. They ranged from typically masculine decisions to typically feminine decisions but were confined to decisions affecting the family as a whole. Six indicators of decision-making in the family were taken into consideration and items were selected which were common in any household. In summary, the six aspects of conjugal power investigated are:

1. In your family who makes the final decision to purchase property?[1]
2. In your family who makes the final decision to purchase household goods?
3. In your family who makes the final decision what school the children should attend?
4. In your family who decided about the number of children you should have?
5. In your family who decided to have no more children?
6. In your family who will select marriage partners for your children?

The response categories to the first five questions were based on four types of responses ranging from 'husband', 'husband and self jointly', 'self' and 'others'. The last question on selection of marriage partners for children had different response categories (parents and children) and hence are not included in forming the 'power scale'.

[1] Purchase of a house or an apartment or land for constructing a house.

The data collected are analysed statistically. Chi square analysis is used to determine if differences in response patterns exist between the employed and the non-employed respondents. If a correlate is not statistically significant, it still may be reported for comparative purposes. The results of the questions on decision-making are tabulated and presented in summary form.

Results

This section describes women's decision-making power in various contexts of family life.

Table 6.1 Who Makes the Final Decision about the Purchase of Property?

(column percentages)

Person who decides	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Husband	22	30
Self and husband jointly	74	62
Self	4	6
Missing	0	2
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 2.34$; d.f = 3; $p < .50$

Table 6.1 shows that there is not much difference between employed and non-employed women in relation to decisions about purchase of property. The quantitative data show that both groups have a say in the purchase of property as it involves a substantial amount of money. Though the qualitative data tend to support this finding, it goes a step further to show that clearly husbands have the final say. Mrs. Sharma, aged 45, non-employed said:

> I think all women whether employed or not should have the right to be included in the family's decision-making process. In a middle-class family like ours we know very well that we will only once buy a property or a house. So when we bought this apartment my husband and I consulted about the price, the size, about the location but the final decision was of course taken by my husband. I am happy to give him that ultimate edge as he is the one who is employed and has put in the money.

The qualitative data show that routine decisions such as what to eat for dinner or how much money to spend on grocery shopping may have been important during the first few years of marriage but with the passing of time routine concerns fall into place, take a pattern and no longer engage couples seriously. Mrs. Kar, aged 45, working as an office administrator, stated:

> My husband and I used to discuss everything in the first few years of our marriage. Being newly married we were getting to know each other and hence we did not want any confrontations at all. However, now that I have been married for many years and have had children other things have become more important like education of our children. We now barely discuss what we would like to have for dinner or what groceries to buy. These have all fallen into place and are my domains now. My husband is happy with whatever decisions I make on simple household matters.

It is evident from the above discussion that husbands do not generally interfere with mundane matters or routine activities but have a high level of power over wives on important matters. The wife is the primary decision maker only on day-to-day affairs. Husbands consult their wives before they spend large sums of money on buying expensive household goods. However, the qualitative data proves that the final decision is usually made by husbands.

It is customary in Bengali society for men to marry women younger than themselves. Because males tend to be more educated than females in a conjugal relationship, husbands have more power to make decisions than their wives. The

idealised concept of the husband as the sole power holder still exists at a formal level and he actually takes the final decision in most cases.

Table 6.2 Who Makes the Final Decision about the Purchase of Household Goods? (column percentages)

Person who decides	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Husband	16	14
Self and husband jointly	78	72
Self	6	12
Missing	0	2
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 2.18$; d.f = 3; $p < .53$

The data on decisions about household purchases also show a similar pattern. It is clear that some power and authority is vested in the wives as far as discussion goes irrespective of whether they are employed or not. Mrs. Bhawal, aged 42, non-employed, commented:

> When we discuss decision-making it is important which areas of decision-making we are talking about. For example, in my family my husband discusses with me before purchasing any household goods and then sometimes we take joint decisions. However, when it involves buying something that is expensive [Q. Like what?] Say a car, then my husband makes the decision by himself. Now it depends how you categorise this power business. If you think that taking the final decision is the actual power then yes, my husband has definitely more power than me on important matters but mundane decisions like buying household goods are taken jointly.

One other indicator of women's position in the family is their participation in children-centred decisions in the family. In Indian society, although child-rearing is associated with feminine roles, female participation in

decision-making on vital matters concerning children is not encouraged, as this is regarded as a male domain.

Chapter 5 showed that many urban middle-class Bengali families have at the most two children. The strong desire for upward mobility in Bengali society makes the decision about the child's education of great importance so it is reasonable to expect that the final decision in such matters will be made by the husband including decisions relating to the age at which schooling is to be started and the type of school. The type and quality of schooling are vital in the development of the career of a child. In traditional Bengali society, it was the father or the grandfather who used to play a decisive role in this matter.

Table 6.3 Who Makes the Final Decision about the Schooling of Children?

(column percentages)

Person who decides	Employed women (N=40)	Non-Employed women (N=46)
Husband	12.5	24.4
Self and husband jointly	80.0	60.0
Self	7.5	13.4
Missing	0.0	2.2
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 6.34$; d.f = 4; $p < .17$

This question was 'not applicable' to 8 employed and 5 non-employed women who were childless and 1 non-employed woman did not answer the question.

In response to the question 'who decides about the kind and quality of schooling for the children in the family', we find from the quantitative data that in most cases there is some discussion. However, there is a difference between quantitative and qualitative data and between employed and non-employed

women. When each of these questions was asked again during in-depth interviews women became open and specific and gave more accurate responses. They said that even though they are consulted and there is some discussion more important and final decisions are taken by their husbands. Employed women are more likely to have a say. In very few families are decisions about the schooling of children taken only by women. The qualitative data give a different picture to quantitative data. As Mrs. Maity, aged 45, non-employed, said:

> I have two school-going children. Before the admission of my older child my husband and I had some discussions. We wanted a school which was good, not very expensive and somewhere closer to home. This would help me to take my child to school and bring her back. For my daughter it was not a problem and we decided mutually. However, the second time for our son we had problems as this was about six years later. There was a tremendous rush so we had to admit our son to a different school. But this was not a joint decision and my husband selected a school which was good and also had their own transport facilities (I mean school bus) for the students. So you can see that as far as the education of our children is concerned my husband has a greater say. This may be because I am not employed.

Hence employment status did have some effect on decision-making in this case.

With regard to decisions about fertility, the costs and benefits of an additional child versus the costs and benefits of fertility regulation are being weighed by both employed and non-employed women of Bengali society today. In this study I assume that contemporary middle-class Bengali women limit the number of children they have. This is mainly because more women are taking up paid employment outside their homes, and with the rapid inflation more children, especially in middle-class families, are considered as 'cost'. So women take

family planning seriously. Here I examine only whether there are any differences between employed and non-employed women in implementing family planning.

Table 6.4 In Your Family Who Decided the Number of Children You Would Like to Have?[2] (column percentages) [a]

Person who decides	Employed women (N=42)	Non-Employed women (N=48)
Husband	7	6
Self and husband jointly	88	76
Self	5	11
Missing	0	6
Total = N	100	99

$\chi^2 = 5.10$; d.f = 4; $p < .27$
a. Figures may not add up to 100 due to rounding errors.
Note: Apart from 13 women who were childless 3 non-employed women did not answer this question.

Table 6.4 gives results for the question 'who decided the number of children you would have?' Again the table shows that decisions are made jointly about family size though the qualitative results give a different picture. In Bengali society the birth of a child gives the wife a greater say in the decision-making process, especially in matters concerning children.[3] One non-employed woman, Mrs. Maitra aged 40, said:

> You must be knowing how important it is to have children once a woman is married. In Bengali society as in many other Indian societies the status of women is changed with the birth of a child. I think women who are non-employed desire to have children more because it is more unfortunate for them not to have any children. Employed women at least spend a

[2] The questions on decision to have children, preference for the sex of the children and decision to have no more children were applicable to 42 employed women as 8 of them were childless and 45 non-employed women as 5 of them were childless.

[3] Chapter 4 showed that children are desired by both men and women after marriage because childlessness is considered a bad fate in Bengali society.

majority of their time outside during the daytime and thus can have good excuses for not wanting to have a child soon after marriage. However, irrespective of their work status a woman in our society can be made to feel her misfortune by her family members including her husband and neighbours if she fails to become a mother within about five years of her marriage.

A question that women were asked during the interviews was whether they had a preference about the sex of their child. Amniocentesis was originally used as a technique to determine genetic abnormalities. However, today all over India, amniocentesis is being used to determine the sex of the unborn baby and to seek an abortion if the fetus is female.[4]

A ban on the misuse of the technology in government institutions has led to its privatisation and commercialisation. Sex determination clinics mushroomed all over the country. There were protests and agitations by women's organisations. Surveys were conducted which showed that it has become a flourishing business all over the country. In many communities female infanticide has become a common practice. It is practised among the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated (Dyson 1987; Premi 1991; Venkatachalam and Srinivasan 1993; Streevani Documentation Centre 1997).

A son is considered very important to any Indian family. The belief is that he is an asset and an investment that will bring returns in the future by taking economic responsibility for the parents in their old age. A preference for sons is likely to be strong also because the labour market is segmented by sex.

[4] A study conducted in Bombay reported that of 8,000 abortions performed after sex determination tests, 7,999 were of female fetuses; the exception was one of a Jewish woman who wanted a girl. See Mishra (1995)

Under such circumstances sons are valued for economic reasons. Daughters on the other hand are often considered a liability, a burden to be borne and then given away to another family along with a sizable dowry. Daughters are not an additional source of security to women or their households.

The women in my sample were asked whether they had ever had an abortion of a female fetus. All women answered in the negative. Some said that even though they had a preference for sons they were happy in having only daughters. Mrs. Kanungoe, aged 35, employed as a senior research fellow, stated:

> Since children are desired so much by married couples in Bengali society it does not really matter whether the child is a girl or a boy. Definitely not for the first time. I have two daughters and I must tell you I was very happy the first time. The second time my husband and I decided to have a second child. I got a test done and we both knew that we were going to have yet another girl. However, this did not change our mind at all. I think it is much better to have children than to be childless. So what if they are girls? It is important that we parents educate them well enough so that they can stand on their own feet and be independent. Though bringing up children is difficult, at times I get over worked with the work outside and at home. However, I still think it is all worth it.

With the spread of education and knowledge of family planning, middle-class women in Bengali society are becoming more assertive about the frequency of procreation (Debi 1988; Standing 1991). The women in my sample were all educated, and they had husbands who were educated as well.[5] Though the husbands were familiar with modern norms of marital decision-making and therefore were likely to grant their wives a share of authority, the final decision was always taken by them.

[5] Bengali husbands are gradually becoming familiar with the idea that marriage is about sharing.

Table 6.5 In Your Family Who Decided to Have No More Children?

(column percentages)

Person who decided	Employed women (N=42)	Non-Employed women (N=45)
Husband	5	9
Self and husband jointly	93	84
Self	2	2
Missing	0	5
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 4.41$; d.f = 5; $p < .49$

The table reporting decisions on having no more children confirm this general picture. Most women discuss this issue jointly with their husbands. Employed and non-employed women on average had two children. Irrespective of whether they are dual-earner or single-earner families, the husbands jointly make the final decision on how many children they want to have.

Though Table 6.1 to Table 6.5 all indicate that decisions are made jointly by husband and wife predominantly the qualitative data suggest different conclusions. Even though respondents tend to report decisions as joint, in the in-depth interviews they indicate that they are not really joint. This further suggests that purely quantitative items are not reliable indicators for measuring complicated areas like decision-making. In the qualitative data there is a significant shift from the results shown by quantitative data.

Thus, my findings suggest that middle-class marriages in a patriarchal Bengali society are moving forward very slowly towards egalitarianism. Though on certain occasions joint decisions are made, it does not indicate gender equality as final decisions are still made by husbands.

While it is true from the qualitative data that final decisions on important matters are made by the husband, there is some consultation with the wife before the final decision is taken. Thus, employed women do not necessarily enjoy more power than non-employed women because of their work status. The employment of women outside the household does not necessarily reduce the domestic power of husbands. However, in all six decision-making areas identified, even though the final decision is made by men the results from the tables show that there is some discussion before a final decision is made. For one couple, duration of marriage has had no major effect on decision-making, which is structured in the early years of marriage. On this point Mrs. Talukdar, aged 42, working as a librarian, said:

> Though we lived in a joint family since my marriage almost 17 years back my husband has made all final decisions though there was some consultation. I do not think because I am employed I have more say in family matters. Yes, perhaps because of my employment and the money that I bring home I am usually consulted instead of my parents-in-law before any decision is made. Who knows if I did not have any job perhaps I would not have had this position in my own family?

Financial Power Within the Household

Another way of measuring women's power within families is by examining husbands' and wives' relative financial power (Agarwal 1988; Ganesh and Risseeuw 1993; Lingam 1994). Edgell's (1980) study of British middle-class couples shows that decisions which involve a large sum of money are taken by men whereas the women made decisions on day-to-day minor affairs not involving large amounts of money.

Another study of dual-earner couples in the United States concludes that the fact that women are in employment in large numbers does not necessarily give them financial decision-making power (Hertz 1986). Similar conclusions are drawn by Stamp (1985) from her UK study. The few studies that have been conducted in India show similar results (Agarwal 1988; Ganesh and Risseeuw 1993; Lingam 1994).

Australian studies reach similar conclusions. Bryson (1975) concludes that Australian wives have more authority within traditional female matters of the family, whereas husbands have more authority in taking decisions over traditionally male-defined aspects of the family.

Similarly, Edwards (1984) concluded that 'nearly all husbands either had a joint say in financial decisions or overall control of finances, even if their wives had paid employment'(Edwards 1984:152). Hence, the fact that women are taking up paid employment in large numbers does not necessarily bring any dramatic changes in the power relations between husbands and wives.

Traditionally, Bengali women had no economic power. However, I hypothesise that the employment of women will increase wives' economic power. A woman's contribution to the family income may enable her to have a voice in saving or spending her own income. Table 6.6 shows that not only employed but also non-employed women have separate bank accounts from their husbands, giving them some discretionary power over their own personal

expenditure.[6] Employed women are more likely than non-employed women to have separate bank accounts.

Table 6.6 Do You Have a Separate Bank Account from Your Husband?

(column percentages)

Responses	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Yes	68	42
No	32	58
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 6.82$; d.f = 1; $p < .05$

Table 6.7 Separate Bank Account Holders and Types of Families

(column percentages)

Families	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Nuclear family	18	44
Joint or extended family	82	56
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 7.01$; d.f = 2; $p < .02$

Majority of employed women living in joint and extended families have separate bank accounts. Of the 32 per cent who do not have separate bank accounts most of them live in nuclear families. Of the 58 per cent of non-employed women who do not have separate bank accounts, majority of them also live in nuclear families.

[6] Arguably non-employed women with separate bank accounts have more power because they can spend money which they have not earned.

The fact that most women living in nuclear families do not have separate bank accounts can be explained by the fact that women living in nuclear families may not be subordinate to their in-laws and so do not necessarily have independent accounts. As Mrs. Deb Roy, aged 32 and not employed, commented:

> People may be surprised with the fact that I do not have a separate bank account. There are two reasons for not having one. First, I do not have my own income so as to open an account and secondly, to be honest I never felt the desperate need to have one. Whatever savings we have it is all in my husband's account. According to the family's needs I can ask him to give me money which he usually does willingly.

As shown in Chapter 5 women take the major responsibility for most household chores and child care. Irrespective of these responsibilities women do not have the final say on matters within or outside the household. Mrs. Sen Gupta, aged 35 and employed as an office administrator, commented:

> By and large the final decision is taken by my husband whether it is related with household matters or something to do outside the family. However, decisions in petty household matters like what fish or vegetables to buy are usually decided by me. In important matters like buying household goods for example, a television set or a refrigerator it is often his decision. Here I must also add something, that the final decision of which brand to buy or what size to buy of these things is usually decided by my husband. Sometimes I do feel agitated at this. I know very well that my husband usually includes me in the decision of whether to buy a television or not, because he knows very well that I am going to put in half of the purchase money. Had I not been employed probably he would not have even bothered.

Contribution to the family income may not always increase women's status unless backed by real power in spending the family's income. In the Bengali culture a woman has real power only when she has the authority to spend either her own income or the family's income. Contribution to the family income

does not necessarily give any power especially if the husband has the power to spend it (Debi 1988; Standing 1991).

Table 6.8 Who Spends the Family Income on Major Purchases?

(column percentages)

Who spends income	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Husband	36	92
Husband and Self jointly	52	4
Self	10	2
Head of the family	2	0
Missing	0	2
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 37.48$; d.f = 4; $p < .05$

Table 6.8 shows that 92 per cent of the husbands of non-employed women spend the family income on major purchases whereas in dual-earner households such decisions are generally taken jointly. However, even in dual-earner households more than one-third of husbands usually spend the money despite the fact that their wives are earning. Only 1 in 10 employed women has the same discretionary power in the family.

Because women's earnings are not very high or are not higher than their husbands', they do not affect the balance of family power and the ultimate power rests in the hands of husbands.

Attitudes To Women's Power Within the Household

To further explore decision-making within the household, I examined women's attitudes towards different decision-making areas. Decisions about paid employment are important in a person's life. Unlike the situation in developed countries, where educated women participate in the labour force on a large scale, such participation is limited in India. The continuation of a job after marriage in the past was decided mainly by the woman's affinal kin and her husband. If women have to obtain permission in professional matters from their spouses or in-laws, this will amount to the curtailment of their liberty and autonomy and thus continue the traditional dominance of men over women.

To examine this question the respondents (employed women only) were asked to indicate whether their husbands and in-laws approved of their employment outside the home. In urban middle-class Bengali families today the husband remains the central authority for women, not the father-in-law as was in the past, at least in joint or extended families.

Table 6.9 Husbands' Attitude Towards Wife's Employment As Reported By Respondents (column percentages)

Husband's attitude	Employed women (N=50)
Strongly disapproves	2
Disapproves	2
Approves	46
Strongly approves	50
Total	100

Note: This question was not applicable to 50 per cent of the sample who constitute the group of non-employed women.

The data show that only a very small percentage (4 per cent) of husbands oppose their wives' employment.[7] Half strongly approve of their wives' paid employment. The underlying reasons given by these women for having the approval of their husbands were economic necessity or a desire for a higher standard of living, pride in wives' employment or belief in women's economic independence. In only two cases the husbands either disapproved or strongly disapproved of their wives being in paid employment. The positive attitudes indicate changing social norms in Bengali society. Mrs. Nandi, aged 43 and working as a senior research fellow with the approval of her husband, stated:

> Why would he oppose me being employed outside the home? Because it is my money which helps us to have this extra comfort in life. Not that my money is an absolute necessity for the family but it does make a difference. When my children were young I had thought of leaving my job several times. It was my husband who made me understand how frustrated I would feel later in life if I made a hasty decision. I had worked before my marriage and have been working continuously since then. My husband during the time of our marriage had accepted and approved of the fact that I was working though his family was a little reluctant in the beginning.

[7] Note that if husbands oppose then women will not be employed. When this issue was raised with the two women who were employed irrespective of their husband's approval they said that they did have some marital problems and hoped to work them out with their husbands.

Table 6.10 In-laws' Attitude Towards Wife's Employment As Reported By Respondents (column percentages)

In-laws' attitude	Employed women (N=50)
Strongly disapprove	12
Disapprove	8
Approve	58
Strongly approve	22
Total	100

Note: This question was not applicable to 50 per cent of the sample who constitute the group of non-employed women.

Another question asked of employed women was how their in-laws reacted to them taking up paid employment. Assuming the dominant view in the older generation to be that the place of women is in the home, I expected the women's in-laws to hold very negative views about wives' employment.

However, the results did not confirm these expectations: 22 per cent of the in-laws strongly approve and 58 per cent approve of their daughter-in-law's employment outside the home.[8] In a joint family, additional income affects family life favourably. However, there were a few cases where fathers-in-law either disapprove or strongly disapprove of their daughters-in-law being in paid employment. This attitude reflects a greater conservatism on the part of the in-laws.

[8] Though compared to husbands a larger percentage of in-laws disapproved of women's employment it did not have as strong an effect as it would with husband's disapproval.

Table 6.11 In Your Family Who Will Choose Marriage Partners For Your Children? (column percentages)

Person choosing partner	Employed women (N=42)	Non-Employed women (N=43)
Parents	12	6
Individual	72	80
Missing	16	14
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 1.27$; d.f = 2; $p < .52$

Note: Missing data include 13 women in total who were childless and 2 non-employed women who did not answer the question.[9]

Table 6.11 shows that, irrespective of paid work, both employed and non-employed women hold modern views on choosing partners for their children. A few held conservative views.[10] When this issue was probed more deeply in the in-depth interviews, the responses were interesting. Mrs. Mazumdar, age 35, employed as a senior research assistant, commented:

> I want to give personal freedom to my children to choose their own partners. It will be at least another 20 years before my children will reach the age of marriage. With the world moving so fast I think we have to change our old fashioned ideas too. Just because I had an arranged marriage does not mean that I expect the same from my children. As long as they choose someone who will be up to our expectations I don't have any problems with that [Q. Like what?] By that I mean as long as their partners are educated and established with jobs, decent and nice, that is all that I expect. There is no harm in expecting.

In addition to examining specific areas of decision-making I also attempted to measure the aggregate balance of power in the family. In particular

[9] This question was applicable only to women who had children (during the time of data collection in 1996) because I wanted to find the current decision-making power of women.

[10] In this study the word 'conservative' means traditional.

areas husbands may be the ultimate decision-makers but their influence may not be all-pervading. Women were asked 'whether they thought husbands' should have absolute superiority in decision-making'.

Table 6.12 When Making Decisions Do You Think Husbands Should Have Absolute Superiority?(column percentages)

Absolute superiority	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Strongly disagree	34	52
Disagree	40	24
Agree	18	12
Strongly agree	8	12
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 4.88$; d.f = 3; $p < .18$

The results show that very few agree that their husbands should have absolute authority in decision-making, though as seen earlier the participation of women in decision-making in different areas show that the husbands' superiority on all matters prevails in the households. Mrs. Sur aged 35, non-employed, said:

> Even though in Bengali society men have absolute power in both inside and outside matters things have gradually started changing over the last 10 years or so. Even during my parents time all decisions were taken by my father and my mother accepted that. She also accepted the absolute superiority of my father in all household decisions. Now as more women are entering paid employment they have become more assertive in their demands. This change has had an effect on the thinking of non-employed women too. Just because I am not employed I don't think that my husband should have absolute superiority in the decision-making process though in reality very often he does.

Table 6.13 Do You Think That Employed Wives Should Have More Say than Non-Employed Wives in Family Decision-Making Process? (column percentages)

More say	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Strongly disagree	16	42
Disagree	44	50
Agree	14	4
Strongly agree	26	4
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 16.86$; d.f = 3; $p < .05$

A related question was 'whether employed women should have more say than non-employed women in the family'. This particular question helps establish what women think of their position in the family. As expected, more non-employed women disagree with this statement. They feel that, irrespective of their economic independence or dependence, women should have a say in household matters.

On the other hand, more employed women feel that their position in the family should be somewhat different from that of their non-employed counterparts because they make a greater financial contribution to the family. Because of their economic independence, they feel that they are entitled to have more say than non-employed women in the family.

To examine what women think about their positions within the family another question that was asked was 'whether women agree that wives can legitimately claim to take part in the family decision-making process'.

Table 6.14 Do You Agree That Wives Can Legitimately Claim To Take Part in the Decision-Making Process? (column percentages)

Legitimate claim	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Strongly disagree	0	2
Disagree	4	2
Agree	20	20
Strongly agree	76	76
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 1.33$; d.f = 3; $p < .72$

Table 6.14 also gives similar data on women's power within the family. Most women from both groups feel that they should have a legitimate claim to participate in the decision-making processes of the family.

Measurement of Female Autonomy

Measures of power depend to a large extent on the area being considered. In order to get an overall view of family decision-making I created two scales. The first is concerned with 'decisions about purchases' and includes questions on 'purchase of property and household goods'. The second is concerned with 'decisions about children' and includes questions on 'schooling of children', 'whether to have children' and 'when to have no more children'. The last item (selection of marriage partner for children) is omitted from the score scale because it has different response options.

The response 'scale for decision-making on purchase of property and household goods' identifies three levels of power, low (husband decides), medium (husband-wife decide jointly), and high (wife decides). The lowest

score of '1' is given to 'husband only taking the decision', '2' is given to 'husband and wife jointly taking the decision', '3' to 'wife only taking the decision'. When 'others had taken the decision' it is considered as 'missing data' and is not included in the scale.

Firstly, responses on the 'decision to purchase property and household goods' are summed to create a scale ranging from '2 to 6' ('household decision-making scale'). For the purposes of the scale, items coded '4' are considered as 'missing data' in order to focus on power sharing between husbands and wives. A low score indicates that the husband dominates decision-making, while a progressively higher score indicates more power for wives.

The 'scale for decision-making on children' was scored the same way. The responses to the children-centred decisions are also summed to create a scale ranging from '3 to 9' ('the children-centred decision-making scale'). Again a low score indicates that wives have less power.

Table 6.15 Mean Scores on Household Decision-Making Scale Between Husbands and Wives

Household Decision	Employed women N=50	Non-Employed women N=50	F ratio
Household goods purchase	5.7	6.1	1.28
Property purchase	5.5	5.4	.03
Total/2	5.6	5.8	.28

Table 6.15 reports data for 'the household decision-making scale', that is, the average of the two areas of decision-making. A lower score indicates a more traditional arrangement of decision-making within the household whereas a higher score indicates a more egalitarian pattern of decision-making. Decisions on the purchase of household goods and property tend to be made jointly in both kinds of households, though the qualitative interviews show that the final decision is taken by the husbands. There are only minor differences between the two groups of women.

Table 6.16 Mean Scores on Children Centred Decision-Making Scale Between Husbands and Wives

Children Centred Decision	Employed women N=50	Non-Employed women N=50	F ratio
Schooling of children	7.1	6.4	1.5
Decision to have children	6.9	6.8	.08
Decision to have no more children	6.9	6.9	.01
Total/3	6.6	6.7	.63

Table 6.16 reports data on the 'children-centred decision-making scale'. Important decisions on schooling of children, having children, and to have no more children are usually discussed jointly by husbands and wives in both dual and single-earner households. However, husbands have the final say. Overall there is little difference between employed and non-employed women.

What is the explanation of this pattern? As shown in the quantitative data with increasing education and growing paid employment the position of Indian

women within the family is gradually moving towards egalitarianism in that there is some consultation with wives before the final decision is made by husbands. However, data from the interviews show that in the majority of the cases the ultimate power rests with the husbands irrespective of whether women are employed or not. Employment has improved the position of employed women relative to non-employed women regarding 'purchasing property and schooling of children'. However, general social change seems to have affected this middle-class sample of Bengali women to much the same extent, irrespective of their current employment status.

The following section examines the relationship between decision-making and selected aspects of family structure such as age, education, family type and income, and indicates whether they affect decision-making within the household.

Correlations Between Independent Variables and Decision-Making

This section discusses the correlation between particular independent variables and the five areas of decision-making. I have chosen these few independent variables because I want to examine whether apart from employment, independent variables such as age, age of husband, number of children, type of family and number of household members, marriage type and age at marriage have any effect on decision-making with the family. Other independent variables such as year of starting the job, whether it is a source of satisfaction in life, and the position and salary of respondents are also analysed to see if they had any effect on women's decision-making within the family.

It is generally agreed that in Bengal a woman's authority and autonomy within the home increases with age. As she grows older and has children, she is accorded, or assumes, more power. In India, women's residential and spatial freedom also increases with age. Older single females are less restricted in their residential choices than younger ones (Roy 1975; Naik 1979; Mitra 1981; Bhakter 1987; Gupta 1994). This shift in autonomy may also extend to decision-making practices in other areas of family life, like finances and child rearing (Scrimshaw 1976; Nicassio 1977; Omvedt 1980; Gittinger 1990).

However, my study finds no relationship between age and decision-making power among either employed or non-employed women in the areas identified in the preceding paragraphs. As shown in Appendix A Table 3, there is a significant correlation only between the age of the respondents and the 'decision to purchase household goods' and age of husbands and 'decision to purchase household goods' (significant at $p < .05$ in both cases). The higher the age of the respondents and the husbands, the more egalitarian is the relationship between husband and wives regarding the 'decision to purchase household goods'. But age does not correlate significantly with any other decision making in the household.

Another important factor which may affect decision-making is the number of children women have. In the traditional Hindu family, a wife's partial participation in decision-making would normally start from her giving birth to a child, preferably a son. The position of a childless woman is far less favourable although over the years she may gain some power in family decision-making. This process of acquiring decision-making power is accelerated by the birth of a

child. In the traditional Hindu family women acquired status through their roles as mothers. They also enjoyed parental authority and received their children's respect and loyalty, all of which were nurtured through mother-child emotional ties.

In contemporary India, having many children is viewed as a liability rather than as an asset for women's power, unless they have extended family members to take care of children and relieve women of the burdens of child rearing that would otherwise diminish their opportunities to continue in paid employment. Indeed this study shows that in Calcutta having or not having children is not an important criterion to decide the authority of women within the household. The data show that the number of children has no significant correlation with women's decision-making (see Appendix A, Table 3). Mrs. Dastidar aged 44, housewife, said:

> I have three children-two daughters and a son. I don't think that the decision-making authority or power that I have within the family is something to do with the number of children I have. For example, I have a sister who has just one child and she is a full-time house wife too. When I compare her position and her decision-making power within the family with mine it is the same. I think it is basically with time that women acquire some power within the family especially over their children.

I also studied the effect of family type, head of the family and number of household members on the decision-making power of middle-class Bengali women in families. Because more non-employed women live in nuclear families, husbands rather than male elders or male relatives bear the main responsibility for managing the household, raising children, and taking decisions. So in nuclear families where there are no elders, there is necessarily a shift of power to

husbands. However, in my sample, the situation is the same with employed women too. Although more employed women live in joint families, it is the husband who makes final decisions.

If a woman is living in a joint as opposed to a nuclear family, she may have to share decision-making with another member of the household. To explore this possibility, families were grouped as joint, extended and nuclear. Though from the sample it is clear that more employed women live in joint families, their decision-making power is no less than it is among non-employed women, who mostly live in nuclear families.

Thus, in this study there is no significant effect of the type of family or the number of household members or the head of the household on decision-making power. (see Appendix A, Table 3). Mrs. Gupta aged 29, employed as a clerk in a government organisation, said:

> I lived in a joint family for 4 years soon after I got married. But then we had to move to Calcutta because my husband got a promotion and luckily enough I got a transfer too. Since then we have been living in a nuclear family. Living in both joint and nuclear families I can say that the nature of the family does not affect the power of decision-making of the woman unless the older members are very traditional. In my case they were not and I think I have similar decision-making power now compared to what I used to have then. The final decisions are still made by my husband. Nothing much has changed.

In this study independent variables like whether the respondents have separate bank accounts or servants do not have significant effects on their decision-making power (see Appendix A Table 3).

We have seen that urban employed women do not show a tremendous increase in power when gainfully employed outside the home. If they hold high

positions at work and supervise people or have a higher salary, do they have more authority in household matters? For example, does the involvement of a member in external work alter the allocation of tasks and time available for making decisions and other household chores?

Further, the independent variables like the year women started paid employment and whether they consider employment as a major source of satisfaction in their lives do not have any significant correlation to the various decision-making processes within the household (see Appendix A, Table3).

Marriage for women in India is universal. As seen in Chapter 3, previous studies show that with the increase in age at marriage the decision-making power of women also increases. Older women gradually gain more authority to make independent decisions. However, in this study neither type of marriage nor age at marriage of the respondents has any significant correlation with decision-making except for 'the decision on children's schooling. The correlations in Appendix A Table 3 show that the higher the age at marriage of respondents the less is their power to make decision to have children, (significant at $p < .05$). Mrs. Sinha aged 45, non-employed, said:

> I got married quite late by Bengali standards. [Q. How old were you?] I was about 28 years which is quite late. My husband was about 35 years at the time of our marriage. Soon after marriage he wanted to have children as he thought he was already late in setting up a family. However, I on the contrary thought it would be nice to have a couple of years without getting into the responsibility of bringing up children. However, I was not given much option to decide anything as my husband had made up the decision that he would prefer to have a child. As I did not have much choice I gave in.

The qualitative results show that the wives in this study are aware of their

husbands' formal power and conscious of the fact that their own power is restricted by their social and economic (for non-employed women) dependence on their husbands. However, as we see from the data, women enjoy some *de facto* power in day-to-day domestic situations and exercise some influence over matters which were traditionally in the domain of their husbands. Women in middle-class Bengali society have also achieved power because they manage the family, especially their children, and carry out the bulk of child care tasks. However, compared to women in developed countries, Bengali women have much less domestic power. Mrs. Ghatak, aged 40, non-employed, said:

> You must be aware that in Bengali families it is the women who do the majority of housework and child care. There are very few men who do actual housework. Whether employed or not it is the responsibility of the women. By taking the responsibility of the entire household in a way we also acquire some power over mundane day to day things. It is still like a boon in disguise. For example, in my family, I am the one who spends the maximum time with our son who is about 10 years old. Since I spend so much time with him I know all about his performance at school, which are the subjects he is weak in and whether he needs any paid tutorial assistance or not. In short, I take some decisions as far as our son is concerned. Again, since I stay at home, I keep an account of how much money we have and how much money can be spent on different items. So in a way I manage a lot of things accordingly. But when it comes to taking decisions on major things the final decision is always made by my husband. I think that is the way husbands and wives should work for their own family's interest.

The data so far show that there is domination by husbands over their wives. However, women are not totally subservient to their husbands even if they are not employed. Husbands take the final decision but they remain partly accountable to their wives. Thus, while the ideals of society in India allow

husbands to reserve power unto themselves, they sometimes share decision-making with their wives. Mrs. Bhadra, aged 45, non-employed, commented:

> I think in most families the ultimate power to make the final decision lies with the husband and more so in single-earner households. But things have changed from our mothers' time when women were not even informed of any major decisions that were taken in the family. And even if they were they had no say at all. Any decision made by the older male members of the family (if it was a joint or extended family) was the ultimate decision. Now though all women do not work some sort of consultation does take place in most families (unless the husband is very traditional). I think it makes some difference if one is consulted for any major decision. At least it makes one feel important and wanted... it is education and employment that has brought some changes in the domestic arena of Bengali society. Though there may not be strict domestic division of labour within the family, as even today women do most of the inside household work, there has been some change in the decision-making patterns of the family. It will take a while before women will gain more power within the family. I hope that just the way there have been gradual changes in the decision-making patterns within the family there will also be some changes in the domestic division of labour some day.

While evidence is beginning to appear that the very rigid traditions of total male superiority, dominance and leadership in Indian society have begun to recede, and contemporary husband-wife relationships are undergoing some changes, still the Indian husband remains the ultimate decision-maker in important matters.

Women's Power Within the Work Place

The analysis in this section focuses on power relations in the workplace. It is important to study the power of women at work as it may have some effect on family decision-making processes. It has been argued that the position and experience of women at work will play a part in determining their decision-

making power and organisation of finances within the household (Morris 1990). Do women with authority at work have more authority at home, or has work authority no spill over effect on the domestic sphere?[11] Job performance in the public service involves different factors like independent thinking, taking decisions and their implementation. Employed women were asked if they had authority over a number of areas in their jobs. The first concerned 'whether women had the power to decide when to come to work'?

6.17 Autonomy to Decide on Work Time (column percentages)

Who takes the decision	Employed women (N=50)
Own decision	36
Other's decision	48
Joint decision	16
Total	100

As shown in Table 6.17 the 'decision on the time to come to work' was mainly taken by 'others'. However, around one third of the respondents claimed it was a joint decision between the respondent and her superior.[12] Mrs. Saha, aged 30, employed as a researcher, narrated:

> I have been working in this organisation for a few years now. [Q. How many years exactly]. Well...let me think, exactly 5 years. I am finishing my Ph.D. as well as working as a research assistant for my supervisor. As

[11] All the autonomy-at-work questions were applicable to only 50 per cent of the sample in paid employment.

[12] Usual working hours in public service offices in India are from 10.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. with an hour lunch break. However, the private sectors have their own working hours which are longer, usually from 9.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m.

far as the work time is concerned I maintain my own schedule and try to be at work by 9.30. It is my own work and if I don't do it I will have to suffer. I have mentioned earlier that my husband is not at all supportive of my working outside the home and as a result of this we have problems very often. My supervisor is very understanding of my situation and if I am late (which happens very rarely) we negotiate among ourselves.

6.18 Autonomy to Decide to Take a Day Off (column percentages)

Who takes the decision	Employed women (N=50)
Own decision	80
Other's decision	2
Joint decision	18
Total	100

On the other hand most women have the power to decide to take a day off. This is interesting because it shows that even though women do not have great power in the domestic sphere, they do exercise some power at their workplace. Autonomy in setting the pace of work is also a good indicator of authority at the workplace. Women (especially those in higher positions) employed in the public service have considerable autonomy at work. They can decide when to take a day off or to slow down their pace of work as long as they manage to finish their work within a given period of time.[13]

[13] In India the rules and regulations are more strictly implemented in the private sector than they are in the public sector.

6.19 Autonomy to Decide to Slow Down Work (column percentages)

Who takes the decision	Employed women (N=50)
Own decision	68
Other's decision	18
Joint decision	14
Total	100

Table 6.19 suggests that the respondents enjoy considerable power at their place of work. Two thirds reported that they took their own decision to slow down their pace of work if they wanted. Only 14 per cent had to decide it jointly with their colleagues and team workers. For the remainder it was decided by their supervisors. A different pattern characterises decisions about the introduction of new work. Work is given to the respondents by their supervisors, and it is usually up to them to decide when to introduce new work in consultation with their subordinates.

6.20 Autonomy to Decide to Introduce New Work (column percentages)

Who takes the decision	Employed women (N=50)
Own decision	22
Other's decision	22
Joint decision	56
Total	100

Table 6.20 shows that the majority of respondents make this decision jointly with their supervisor. A few women had the authority to introduce new

work on their own. Amongst 11 women who could do so, 4 were the heads of their sections or departments. However, sometimes before taking the final decisions, they consulted their juniors.

The results from this study show that there is no significant correlation between the position of employed women at work and the authority they enjoy in making decisions at home (see Appendix A, Table 3). Mrs. Nandi, aged 43, working as a senior research fellow, stated:

> We had bought this house a few years back. Even though both of us have moderately good jobs I must admit it was quite difficult to come up with so much money. Had it not been for my job I don't think it would have been possible to purchase any property at all. As you know property prices in Calcutta have gone up tremendously during the last few years. Since I had put in a lot of money for the house I had the option to express my view on the size of the house. The final decision was made by my husband. Even though women are earning in our society most final decisions are made by men because Bengali men like to exercise authority and control over their family.

What do these patterns show? Even though many employed women enjoy some power in decision-making at their work place, this does not translate into greater power within their family. Contrary to my initial expectation women who take major decisions at work do not enjoy similar autonomy within the household. Despite the fact that many Bengali women have entered paid employment, they still have a long way to go to establish an equal position with their husbands in the domestic division of labour and major decision-making processes at home.

Conclusion

With the increasing entry of women to the labour force in recent years in India a few studies have analysed the effects of women's employment on the power relations within the family (Sethi 1983; Chandola 1995; Chauhan 1996). These studies point out that employed women have only marginally more power within the household than non-employed women. They conclude that women's employment does not necessarily bring about an immediate egalitarian distribution of power within the family. In a similar fashion Blackburn and Stewart (1977) argued that the employment of women in the United Kingdom was generally confined to a female labour market. This segregation of women and their unequal status in the labour market both reinforce sex-role inequalities in the family.

With the participation of women in paid employment in Bengal certain changes in the decision-making roles of husband and wife were assumed to be inevitable. However, the qualitative data in this study clearly show that a woman still assumes a secondary position in which the superiority and dominance of her husband is taken for granted. There is little evidence that employed women play a greater role in family decision-making than non-employed women.

Even in families where women make an economic contribution to the budget, in order to maintain harmony at home the woman has to compromise because of the importance attached to her role as a mother. All other roles that a woman performs are considered of secondary importance (Madan 1976; Rani 1976; Mathur 1992; Abraham 1995).

However, if decision-making is taken as an indicator of marital power among employed and non-employed women, although husbands take the final decision the overall pattern is not totally autocratic or patriarchal. The data suggest that central tendency is slowly becoming egalitarian in that a degree of mutual consultation and influence sometimes characterises decision-making among married couples. A close examination of the qualitative data suggests that there is some equality and consultation in the exercise of domestic authority.

A contributing factor to this is a change in husbands' approach to domestic roles. They now tend to be less authoritarian and more willing to share domestic power with their wives. However, although employment appears to have slightly increased women's power in family decision-making, total equality of power between husband and wives is yet to be realised. Data from the interviews show that husbands still have the final say in major decisions.

Somewhat similar conclusions have been drawn by Morris and Ruance (1989). They suggest that women's participation in the labour market is not reducing inequalities in access to decision-making power within the household. By being in paid employment women have modified but not overcome inequalities in household power and the domestic division of labour within the household.

The nature of decision-making in Bengali families is still quite different from what most people experience in Western societies. The nature of decision-making in urban Bengali society is still very patriarchal.

It is clear that the study of power relationships within the family is a very difficult task. As we have seen many methodological problems, in addition to

conceptual difficulties, continue to plague this area of family research. This study has explored only one possible way of dealing with these issues.

CHAPTER 7

SEX ROLE ATTITUDES

Introduction

There has been considerable change in Western countries over the past few decades in the attitudes of women towards their role within the family and society. Several studies on sex role attitudes in the United States document systematic changes towards the greater acceptance of non-familial roles for women (Cherlin and Walters 1981; Herzog and Bachman 1982; Mc Broom 1987; Mason and Lu 1988; Glass 1992).

This chapter examines differences in the attitudes of middle-class employed and non-employed Bengali women, to see if women who work in paid jobs have a more modern outlook than women who are full-time housewives. It is hypothesised that involvement in paid employment is related positively to modern attitudes. We expect the attitudes of women who are employed to be more modern than women who are full-time housewives.

This chapter is organised into five sections. In the first two sections I review previous literature on sex role attitudes. This is followed by a section on methodology where I describe the data and the methods used in this part of the thesis. Then, in the results section I investigate women's perception of paid employment and their status within and outside the family. I postulate that women's perceptions of paid work are influenced by attitudes towards equal gender roles. Women with sex role attitudes which are more egalitarian are more likely to seek higher-status attainment than women who have more traditional

sex role attitudes. This section also discusses whether more employed than non-employed women believe in equality between the sexes in terms of status in the society, decision-making and distribution of property. To depict the overall attitude of women I present a section on attitude scales combined for both groups of women which examines the inter-relationship between background variables and attitudes.

Previous Literature

Many studies have been conducted in the United States and Australia on women's sex role attitudes. In these countries an important feature of research on women's entry into paid labour is its association with the changing nature of sex role attitudes of women and their increasing acceptance of non-traditional roles for themselves. In 1971, Glezer found that 44 per cent of married women between the ages of 18 and 34 agreed with the statement that 'important decisions should be made by the husband'. However, by 1991 only 8 per cent agreed with this statement (Edgar and Glezer 1994). According to Bittman and Lovejoy:'

> Surveys in the 1980's indicated widespread acceptance of egalitarian values by women and men. The 1983 Australian Values study, for example, showed that 87 per cent of Australians agree with the statement that 'men and women should share household jobs'. Educational attainment was associated with egalitarian beliefs, so much so that it is doubtful 'if the attitudes of the highly educated can get much more egalitarian' (Bittman and Lovejoy 1993:7).

Empirical studies conducted in the United States examined the relationship between women's social position and their sex role attitudes. Some of these studies show a positive relationship between education and sex role

attitudes (Plutzer 1988; Thornton 1989). According to these studies the more educated women are, the more egalitarian they are in their sex role attitudes. Other studies found a positive relationship between age and sex role attitudes. The younger a woman is the more likely she will be egalitarian in her attitudes (McCauley and Swatos 1984; Plutzer 1988).

Research conducted recently in several countries shows that variation in women's sex role attitudes is linked to differences in work experiences and lifestyle choices, with full-time homemakers differing from women employed outside the home (Davis and Robinson 1991; Glass 1992). More specifically, employed women express greater support for non-traditional gender roles and gender equality than full-time housewives (Tallichet and Willitis 1986; Plutzer 1988; Glass 1992). Some studies have documented the association of egalitarian sex-role attitudes with several characteristics of women, such as higher levels of education, greater participation in the labour force and smaller families (Smith-Lovin and Tickamyer 1978; Thronton and Freedman 1979). Most of the research on sex role attitudes has studied the association of female employment with changing attitudes about different issues in society (Mason, Czajka and Arber 1976; Davis and Robinson1991; Wilkie 1993).

This study examines whether these patterns are the same in India. The results of studies conducted in other countries cannot be generalised to the situation in India because India is a developing country with distinct cultures for its different regions , language and religion. Most importantly, the level of economic development in India is different from those of the developed countries and results in lower female labour force participation.

Research in India on Sex Role Attitudes

For a long time the literature on Indian women concentrated primarily on the study of female employment and role conflict. Under the impetus of the women's movement and the increased interest of sociologists in the study of women's employment, some researchers have begun to question how attitudes are related to employment. Some studies on sex role attitudes of women have shown that a woman in India still thinks that her most important task is to take care of her husband and children, that her greatest satisfaction comes from children and that she should assume a domestic role even if she is highly educated (Verma 1981; Narang 1996). Others show that despite women's less traditional sex role attitudes, their actual role performance within the family has not changed much (Chauhan 1996; Vir and Mahajan 1996). Both employed and non-employed women are responsible for domestic chores. Husbands rarely participate in domestic tasks. Employed women are expected to accommodate the two roles in the interest of the family. People are still traditional and have not accepted egalitarian relations in the family. It has been argued that, as a result, the position of employed women is sometimes worse than that of non-employed women (Subbamma 1994; Nahar 1996; Menon 1997; Ray and Mishra 1997). On the other hand, a few studies of educated urban women in India have shown that there is a gradual participation of women in non-traditional activities (De Souza 1975; Kelkar 1995; Prasad 1995). However, these studies have not answered in detail the question to what extent employment has altered the sex role attitudes of women.

Apart from this handful of studies there has not been sufficient work done in India on women and sex role attitudes (Bardhan 1985; Das 1988). Most

studies have made no attempt to simultaneously study both employed and non-employed women. What little work has been done has concentrated primarily on atypical groups, such as college students (Blumberg and Dwaraki 1980). Others have included only a few items, thus limiting the generality of the results (Srivastava 1978). Others have concentrated on women's attitudes towards various political issues (Sharma 1996c, 1996d; Mitra 1997; Vidya 1997). In educational psychology, studies have concentrated on attitudes towards school subjects, school activities, teachers training and teaching as a career (Manohar 1984; Kapoor 1992; Das 1995).

Some researchers on sex role attitudes of Indian women have studied women's beliefs about the effects of paid employment, especially role conflict in their family lives, but have neglected views on other aspects of the family such as the domestic division of labour, child care and rearing, and marital power and decision-making (Rani 1976; N. Sharma 1985; Purthi and Sharma 1995; Narang 1996; Jharta 1996).

The few studies conducted in India on sex role attitudes show that the customs and tradition of each community have a strong influence on its members. The community is an important agent of socialisation and the determinant of one's place in the social stratification system (Ghadially and Kazi 1979; Reddy 1986; R. Sharma 1995; Singhal 1995).

Other studies have shown that in families where men had white-collar jobs for two generations or more, women tend to have more egalitarian attitudes to familial and social issues (Jain 1988a; Banerjee 1990; Agarwal 1995). In India each community is distinct from the other, with its own norms for its female and male members. Similarly Bengali society is different from other Indian cultures.

Hence it is important to study the sex role attitudes of Bengali women to see how their customs have affected them.

Chapters 5 and 6 showed that the participation of women in the labour market does not necessarily change their responsibility for domestic duties nor does it bring them more power within the household. Even though women are employed they are still disadvantaged within the family. When conflicts arise it is often women's interests that are sacrificed.

This chapter assesses the changing attitudes of wives. To what extent are women, irrespective of their domestic situation, moving towards more egalitarian sex role attitudes? Since employment exposes women to more non-traditional roles for women does it lead to greater support of modern attitudes?

Importance of Studying Sex-Role Attitudes

Since much of the research on sex-role attitudes is limited to the developed countries a study of this nature is necessary to focus on the factors that contribute to changes in sex-role attitudes in a country that differs from the developed nations of the world.

The domestic division of labour and the nature of decision-making within the family is partially a function of ideology. Hence women with more egalitarian sex role attitudes are expected to have a more equal domestic division of labour and decision-making than women with more traditional attitudes. It may also be expected that women in an equal domestic relationship will develop more egalitarian sex-role attitudes. The domestic lives of women and their attitudes are interlinked.

Chapters 5 and 6 showed that women still feel that domestic roles are paramount in their lives. They accept their roles as wives and mothers as a priority while trying to pursue their career at the same time. This finding prompts the following questions. Does this domestic arrangement affect sex-role attitudes? Does women's household labour time affect their sex role attitudes? Do employed women with more responsibilities hold more egalitarian attitudes than non-employed women with fewer demands on their time?

The changing sex-role attitudes of women may also have implications for the broader society. The way women perceive different social issues will also determine what changes women would like to see in the society to improve their status. It will also affect the socialisation of their children. The study of sex-role attitudes is also important because there is an interaction between women's attitude, behaviour and the constraints women face.

Methodology

Participants in both groups were asked about the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements about the division of labour and authority within the family between husbands and wives, and about the position of women in the larger society. The questions concern attitudes to various social issues. Eight areas were investigated:

1. Do you agree that women in India should be encouraged to take up paid employment outside the home?

2. Do you agree that capable women should be given positions of authority over others at work?

3. Do you agree that employment of women gives them higher status in society?

4. Do you agree that women are entitled to employment even when their husbands can support the family?

5. Do you agree that women should have equal status with men in society?

6. Do you agree that women should have equal rights to property with men?

7. What is your attitude towards divorce as a solution for a broken marriage?

8. What is your attitude towards widow remarriage?

The first four items tap 'attitudes toward employment' and the last four 'attitudes towards social issues'. The response categories to these first eight questions were based on four types of responses: 'strongly disagree', (1), 'disagree', (2), 'agree' (3), and 'strongly agree' (4).

The questionnaire also included questions on the dowry system. Dowry is an age-old practice in Indian society referring to property or valuable security given by the bride's family to the groom's as a consideration for marriage. Dowry may also be regarded as a means for setting up a relation of accord between the bride's family and the husband's family (Nair 1978; Saxena 1995; Shurei 1997).

In spite of the *Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961*, the dowry system still persists in certain parts of West Bengal. In India over the last 20 years or so the demerits of the dowry system have been widely discussed and people are becoming aware of it through newspapers and the media. As education and employment are becoming accessible to more and more middle-class women, it

is possible that unfavourable attitudes to the dowry system will develop. To assess attitudes to the dowry system the following items were included in the questionnaire.

1. What is your attitude towards dowry as giving status?
2. Do you consider that the dowry system gives status to a woman?
3. Are you prepared to give dowry for your daughter?

For the first question responses ranged from '1 to 4'. The lowest score of '1' was given to 'strongly disagree', '2' to 'disagree', '3' to 'agree' and '4' to 'strongly agree'. For the second two questions on dowry the response categories were 'yes' (1) and 'no' (2). Due to differences in the response categories, the questions on dowry are considered separately and not included in the 'sex role attitude scale'.

Presentation of Data

The basic assumption is that employment leads to differences in the attitudes of women to the social issues discussed in the preceding paragraphs. To the extent that a woman deviates from her traditional role by working outside the home, it is assumed that she is likely to change her attitude to conform to her present behaviour or in response to new experiences encountered at work. The major purpose of this study is to test the validity of these hypothesised attitude-behaviour relationships for a cohort of married women. If this assumption holds true employed women should get higher scores, showing that they are less traditional than their non-employed counterparts. A lower score indicates a traditional attitude whereas a higher score indicates a modern attitude towards these issues.

Results

The first question that was asked was 'whether women in India should be encouraged to take up paid employment'.

Table 7.1 Do You Agree that Women in India Should be Encouraged to Take Up Paid Employment Outside the Home? (column percentages)

Attitude to employment	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Strongly disagree	2	0
Disagree	0	4
Agree	28	32
Strongly agree	70	64
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 3.26$; d.f = 3; $p < .35$

Table 7.1 shows that both employed and non-employed women agree with the idea that women in India should be 'encouraged to take up paid employment'. The majority of women believe that paid work is beneficial for women and their families. However, the qualitative data show that though most women accepted that working is beneficial for women, paid employment is rarely seen as the most important object in life. It always has to accommodate household demands and responsibilities. One employed woman said that women should not be encouraged to take up employment outside the home unless their husbands were totally supportive of it or unless there was an absolute necessity, because it can lead to matrimonial problems. She felt that the exclusive maternal role for a woman with a young child was to stay at home and look after her children and husband. Mrs. Sharma, aged 45, non-employed, said:

> I agree that women in our country should be encouraged to take up employment. I think otherwise it is a waste of talent and skills. Why should a woman stay at home or quit her job (especially after marriage) just because of her gender? Women are too often in our society asked to make compromises and I think it is time that we learn to be strong. If not for anyone else a woman should be encouraged to be independent and self reliant for her own self. However, having said that, do not get me wrong. A woman should first keep her house well and then think of a paid job. If she cannot manage both home and work she should first give priority to her children and home and then think about paid employment.

However, in general women felt that employment gives security, independence and emotional satisfaction. Other important reasons for favouring women's employment included the utilisation of education and possibilities for a better standard of living. Working outside the home in paid employment will also help women to compete with men in different areas.

Some non-employed women expressed negative attitudes and dissatisfaction with staying at home, and in general were positive about the prospect of having a job. Women who disagreed with this statement said that women's employment can affect children adversely and that working against the will of husband and in-laws can lead to marital and family tensions. However, most women agreed that work behaviour must accommodate the demands of the roles of wife and mother. Mrs. Adhikari, aged 41, a telephone operator, presented a different view:

> Working is no fun especially once you are married. Women have to work at home before leaving for work in the morning, during the day work in the office and soon on reaching home after work do all the household chores. I have a similar routine and by the end of the day I am exhausted yet I try my best to be a good mother and a good wife. However, despite all my efforts I still have complaints to listen to. I constantly feel guilty of the fact that I am unable to give to my children either the physical or the psychological attention that they need during their growing years. If my children do not turn out to be good I will feel that my life has been a total waste. I know it is too strong a statement to make but that is how I feel occasionally. Sometimes I wonder is this a happy life at all? For all these

reasons I think it is not crucially important for women to enter the labour force unless they have to.

At present the employment of women does not necessarily bring about any dramatic change in their attitudes. Marriage, children and household continue to be important life goals for Bengali women. Bengali culture expects women to behave in a certain manner irrespective of their economic position (Roy 1975, Standing 1991; Martin 1997). Another question that was asked was whether women agreed with the statement that 'capable women should be given positions of authority over others at their place of work'.

Table 7.2 Do You Agree that Capable Women Should Be Given Positions of Authority Over Others At Their Place of Work? (column percentages)

Attitude to authority	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Strongly disagree	0	0
Disagree	2	0
Agree	12	10
Strongly agree	86	90
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 3.13$; d.f = 2; $p < .56$

Table 7.2 presents similar results. It is interesting that as many as 86 per cent of employed and 90 per cent of non-employed women expressed the view that women should occupy responsible positions at work. They feel that if some women are capable they should be given positions of authority over both men and other women. Most respondents feel that given the opportunity women can prove themselves as competent as men. Some interviews highlight this statement. Mrs. Kanungoe, aged 35, employed, said:

> I personally feel that women in general have better planning skills. In top positions particularly in jobs related to health, family planning, social welfare, community development and cultural affairs women do a better job then most men would. However, do not misunderstand me because I have named these few jobs which can be referred to as stereotype 'female jobs'. I also maintain that women in our country can be excellent scientists, engineers, lawyers and so on and can compete at every level with men. So I strongly agree that if women have the potential they should definitely be given positions of authority over others at work

Boserup (1970) has demonstrated that women's status does not necessarily improve with economic development. In an anthropological analysis of underdeveloped countries, Boserup shows that technologically based economic development may have a negative effect upon women's status. However, it has been argued in the Indian literature that women, both employed and non-employed, often agree that paid employment gives women higher status in society (Acharaya and Mathrani 1993; Sharma and Sharma 1995; Ahmad 1996; Lalitha 1996; Giri 1998).

Table 7.3 Do You Agree that Employment of Women Gives Them Higher Status in Society? (column percentages)

Attitude to higher status	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Strongly disagree	2	2
Disagree	34	48
Agree	32	40
Strongly agree	32	10
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 7.40$; d.f = 3; $p < .06$

As expected Table 7.3 shows that nearly two-thirds of employed women strongly agree or agree with the statement that employment gives women higher status in society, whereas only half of non-employed women do. Those who

agree give various reasons. For example Mrs. Purkayastha, aged 39, non-employed, said:

> I had worked for 12 years and had to leave my job due to family commitments. I can tell you this from experience both as an employed and a non-employed woman that employment definitely gives higher status to women in society. When I was working I felt a change in my status because of the economic contribution that I was making towards my family. Work gave me a feeling of independence and self-confidence. As I was more in touch with the outside world I could join in discussions on what was happening in the labour market. Having an independent income and also being more mobile I could pay social visits often and attend social functions which was very much appreciated by the wider society in which I live. So I think directly or indirectly the status of a woman increases due to employment.

The respondents were also asked to give their views on married women's entitlement to employment, since it has been sometimes felt that work interferes with the wife-and-mother role of women.

Table 7.4 Do You Agree That Women Are Entitled to Employment Even When Their Husbands Can Support the Family? (column percentages)

Attitude to employment	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Strongly disagree	0	0
Disagree	6	6
Agree	28	36
Strongly agree	66	58
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 7.58$; d.f = 2; $p < .68$

Most women (94 per cent of both employed and non-employed) strongly agree or agree that married women are entitled to employment even when their husbands can support the family. Women feel that for their own satisfaction and happiness women should earn and be independent. Even if the husband can

support the family, an additional income helps. Mrs. Maitra, aged 40, non-employed said:

> I think women should be entitled to work after marriage even if their husbands can support the family as they may want to work to get satisfaction for themselves other than economic pressure. It is also a way of making use of their education They may like to contribute financially to the family in which they live and care for. They may also want to give a better standard of living to their children. So I feel they should be given the opportunity to make their own decisions in life. By which I mean decisions which will give them happiness.

On the other hand Mrs. Acharya, aged 34, employed stated:

> I personally feel that if a husband can support the family a woman should not work because being a working woman I know how difficult it is to cope up with both work and family. One can perform neither role satisfactorily. This leads to a lot of tension and frustration. Very often one feels that one is failing miserably as a worker, as a wife and as a mother. So I personally see there is no reason for making life difficult by taking up employment unless there is a real need to do so.

As shown in Chapter 2, in theory the Indian Constitution guarantees social equality to all its citizens irrespective of caste, creed, colour or sex, though in practice this goal is far from being realised. Women enjoy the franchise they get equal pay for equal work, and they have equal opportunities for selection and appointment in various services of the country. They also enjoy the right to property and the right to divorce. Legally speaking, women enjoy equal rights in all social, economic and political aspect of the society.

But equality of status under the law will have no meaning if women do not enjoy these rights in their day to day lives. Therefore, to examine the attitude of middle-class Bengali women towards gender equality they were asked whether

'women should have equal status with men in society'. The results do not show any significant differences between employed and non-employed women.

Table 7.5 Do You Agree that Women Should Have Equal Status With Men in Society? (column percentages)

Attitude towards equal status	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Strongly disagree	0	2
Disagree	2	8
Agree	10	24
Strongly agree	88	66
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 7.25$; d.f = 3; $p < .06$

But Table 7.5 shows that both groups strongly agree or agree that women should have equal status with men in society. Other research has shown that middle-class women are aware of the fact that women in India have been discriminated against in society for hundreds of years (Manohar 1984; Deshpande 1992; Agarwal 1996; Jaising 1996; Bakshi 1998). It was only with the Independence of India that the Constitution passed several laws to eradicate inequality for women in society.[1] Educated women in particular are aware of these laws which have been implemented to improve gender equality. Women now feel that they should be recognised as the other half of society. Mrs. Sen Gupta, aged 35, employed said:

> Of course, women should have equal status with men in society. In our society social taboos and psychological conditioning continue to hamper the participation of women in activities outside the home and prevent them from making best use of their abilities. Nevertheless the efficiency

[1] Legislation to protect the rights of women includes Right to education and adequate means of livelihood, Right to vote and contest elections, Factories and Labour Plantation and Mines Acts which regulate working conditions like maternity benefits, creches and nursing times.

with which women perform on a par with men both at work and at home I think should make people realise that women are not inferior and hence should have equal status in society.

The concept of property is another aspect of family life. In the past Indian women were not considered as heirs to ancestral property. Even today in India the subordinate position of women in every segment of the sexual stratification system is graphically reflected in most legal systems. As discussed in Chapter 2 another fundamental right guaranteed to women by the Indian Constitution is *The Hindu Succession Act of 1955,* which in theory has given daughters equal rights to their father's property along with sons.[2]

Table 7.6 Do You Agree that Women Should Have Equal Rights to Property with Men? (column percentages)

Attitude towards equal right	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Strongly disagree	2	0
Disagree	0	8
Agree	16	30
Strongly agree	82	62
Total	100	100

χ^2 =8.51; d.f = 3; p < .03

Table 7.6 shows that most women in my sample (98 per cent of employed women and 92 per cent of non-employed women) believe that women should have equal rights to property compared to men. Overall they hold very favourable attitudes towards women's right to ancestral property. However, as the table

[2] With the implementation of this right the government has made an effort to bridge the inequality that existed between men and women in Indian society. However, in practice property is not shared equally amongst children.

shows about 8 per cent of non-employed women do not agree with it. The difference in attitude between the two groups is statistically significant (at $p < .05$). Mrs. Nandi, aged 43, employed said:

> Women should definitely have equal right to property with men which will give them social security. It will also help them in being recognised as equal by their male counterparts. I think instead of saving money for dowry all parents should educate their daughters and when dividing their property give them equal share. This will help them to feel confident that they are equal with their brothers and no discrimination has been made against them. This in turn will help to bring an attitudinal change in the young minds and they will do the same for their own daughters. For any change for the benefit of the society there has to be a positive attitudinal change.

Women who do not agree with this statement make the following points to justify themselves. Mrs. Sen, aged 38, non-employed commented:

> I do not agree that women should have equal right to men. My main reasons for disagreement are the following. In a patrilineal society like ours it is usually sons who look after parents in their old age (parents often do not have any income) as daughters are married off and leave their natal families. Since it is a tremendous responsibility for the sons I think the parental property should go to them. Only under special circumstances women should get a share of the property. [Q. Like what?]. For example, if there is an abundance of property or if the financial condition of daughters is very bad then they can claim a share in the parental property.

The causal connection between marital dissolution experience and attitudes is an important issue. For couples with strong moral views, divorce is probably less acceptable than for others who use divorce to resolve an unsatisfactory marital relationship. There may even be a substantial number of people who oppose divorce so strongly that they would not consider terminating a marriage (Vinokur 1975; Sahai 1996; Bhatiani 1997). Indian marriages have been shaped over a thousand years by religious differences and vary from region

to region according to linguistic and religious backgrounds. In the Hindu view of life, marriage is seen as *dharma,*[3] especially for a male. Marriage is a sacrament, a holy union and is complete only on the performance of certain rites. In this sense it is irrevocable. It is a sacrament binding together two individuals.

Several studies in India point out that Hindu religious sentiment since the period of the *Dharma Sutras*[4] has been definitely against the dissolution of marriage (Gore 1968; Mehta 1970; Jacobson and Wadley 1992; R. Sharma 1995). With changes in the concept of marriage (see Chapter 4) more women have entered love marriages, producing changes in attitudes toward marital dissolution. However, the concept of divorce is a new phenomenon in Indian society and even today people with traditional views of marriage look with disfavour on the idea of dissolving a marriage. Divorce came to be recognised by law and was introduced by the *Hindu Marriage Act of 1955.* The constitution of India has outlined several conditions under which a divorce can be obtained.[5] Two additional grounds are available to the wife: 1) if the husband has more than one wife living and 2) if he has been guilty of rape, sodomy or bestiality. However, these grounds are an option only under certain conditions. Hence, getting a divorce under Indian law is difficult and time-consuming. To examine to what extent the concept of divorce is acceptable to the respondents they were asked about their attitude towards divorce.

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[3] Duty

[4] Hindu religious scriptures written during 600-300 B.C.

[5] In Chapter 2 I have outlined the grounds under which a divorce can be filed in India.

Table 7.7 What is Your Attitude Towards Divorce As a Solution For A Broken Marriage? (column percentages)

Attitude towards divorce	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Strongly disagree	20	28
Disagree	20	20
Agree	44	50
Strongly agree	16	2
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 6.30$; d.f = 3; $p < .09$

As might be expected more employed women than non-employed women strongly agree or agree that divorce is an acceptable solution when marriage breaks down. Thus, the data are generally, but not completely, consistent with the expectation that women who have greater potential for financial independence outside the family, and who have more exposure to non-familial values, are more approving of divorce than others (Mukherjee and Ramaswamy 1996; Devi 1998). On the other hand, a large proportion of non-employed women (48 per cent) do not agree with divorce as an option for getting out of marriage. This may be due to economic dependence, lack of support from families or religious reasons. Mrs. Maity, aged 45, non-employed, stated:

> I personally disagree with divorce because I think many times couples take it as the easy way out. I feel once you are married you have to make a lot of compromises. You cannot always be selfish and think only about yourself. But this day and age there are few couples who are willing to do so and so take the easy turn to dissolve the marriage. I agree if there are serious problems in the marriage, [Q. Like what?] say if the husband is an alcoholic or is a wife-beater then divorce is the only solution. If there are children involved then I think couples should seriously try their best to work things out.

Another commentary by Mrs. Bhawal, aged 42, non-employed was as follows:

> It is difficult for a non-employed woman to have a divorce because of her economic position. Unlike in developed countries, in India we do not have the concept of social security which means without any independent income a divorced woman very often has to return to her natal family. This is disgraceful and not always possible. Many people may think that non-employed women are very traditional in their attitudes which is not always true. We have to very often bear a lot of injustice because of our financial dependence on others. What is therefore important is that parents should educate their sons and daughters equally which will only secure the future of their daughters. If women have to dissolve their marriage they can do so knowing that they have an income to support them.

During the early years of the nineteenth century social reformers such as Raja Rammohun Roy began to challenge accepted ideas on women like *Sati,*[6] the stigma attached to widowhood, polygamy and child marriage. The Widow Remarriage Bill in India was passed in 1856. It was Bengali *bhadralok* social reformers like Raja Rammohun Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, who with the help of British reformers, abolished *Sati* and introduced widow remarriage.

The Widow Remarriage Bill proposed by Vidyasagar had been considered a victory for the cause of social reform. The triumph was more theoretical than practical and it was not until 1960 with the help and support of social and religious organisations that actual experimentation started.[7] Bengal was the first state in India which implemented unique laws for the improvement of women's position. These laws gradually enlightened the minds of educated people and now widow remarriage is widely accepted by middle-class Bengalis. A comparison of the attitudes of women towards widow remarriage with divorce

[6] Wives 'attaining virtue' by burning alive on the husband's funeral pyre.

[7] For details see Sen (1977)

shows that women are more modern towards widow remarriages than they are towards divorce.

Table 7.8 What is Your Attitude Towards Widow Remarriage?

(column percentages)

Attitude to widow remarriage	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Strongly disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	8
Agree	34	52
Strongly agree	66	40
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 9.07$; d.f = 2; $p < .01$

As shown in Table 7.8, all of the employed women from the sample had a positive attitude towards widow remarriage. Women expressed the opinion that a widow should be allowed to remarry at any age and under any circumstances. Mrs. Mazumdar, aged 35, employed as a senior research assistant in a government organisation, said:

> I strongly agree with the idea of widow remarriage. I think every widow should be given the opportunity of remarrying if she feels the need, either emotional or physical... I think in a country like India widow remarriage will help solve certain problems especially for poor people- like prostitution or begging. [Q. Could you please elaborate on that?]. As you must be aware often when a woman loses her husband at a young age she is prevented from marrying again. Being a destitute with no means of earning she often resorts to prostitution which becomes an easy way of earning money.

But a few non-employed women did not accept widow remarriage, for various reasons. Mrs. Choudhury, aged 26, non-employed, is against widow remarriage. According to her:

> I am against widow remarriage especially if the woman is aged and has children because it creates a lot of confusion for the children. Under

special circumstances, like if a woman is not employed and young it can be a possibility. That is why I agree that education should be imparted to both boys and girls so that women can stand on their own feet.

In discussing the marriage system in India it is important to consider the role of dowry, especially in arranged marriages. It is another traditional feature of Indian society according to which the bride's parents give cash and gifts to the groom's family during the time of the marriage. It has become an obligation for even the poorest father.

Before 1955, women were not given a share in the ancestral property. So the parents of a bride willingly gave money and other household gifts to their daughter to help set up her new home. Thus, a dowry was paid in lieu of inheritance rights for daughters.

Altekar (1962) wrote that marriage had come to be regarded as obligatory for girls in India about 300 B.C. Thomas (1964) maintains that a commercial motive in dowry developed during the early part of this century. A young man with good education and good prospects became much sought after as a bridegroom, and parents of girls vied for the best available prospects. Attitudes towards dowry reflect general value orientations in a society. Among some members of the middle class in India dowry has become one of the easiest ways of acquiring wealth and thereby reaching a high socio-economic status. Over time dowry demands have increased, resulting in exorbitant payments (Rao and Rao 1982; Gutek 1986b; Beneria 1988; Rajan 1993; Pant 1995; Shurei 1997). In this connection, a few studies on attitudes towards dowry have been made. Rao and Rao (1982) and Upreti and Upreti (1982) have studied the attitude of college students towards dowry and marriage in India. These studies show the wide gap

that existed between the attitudes of the people and the practice prevailing in the society. However, very little research exists on attitudes to dowry.

Table 7.9 What is Your Attitude Towards the Dowry System?

(column percentages)

Attitude towards dowry	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Strongly disagree	92	96
Disagree	6	2
Agree	2	2
Strongly agree	0	0
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 1.04$; d.f = 2; $p < .59$

Table 7.9 shows only two respondents agree with the dowry system. But these women feel that it has certain advantages. Those who favour dowry feel that it is a form of social security for their daughters. Others feel that it helps to get better matches. Mrs. Acharya, aged 34, employed as a research assistant in a government organisation, said:

> I think even though dowry payments mean a lot of financial strain it has some advantages. When dowry is given girls have a chance to be married to better partners. Dowry thus forms a kind of social security for women. Since arranged marriages are still very common in India it is by giving dowry that parents can assure good matches for their children. In the future it can also help the daughter to make certain property claims. I know of cases where girls were not given any dowry and were ill-treated by their in-laws. I don't want the same to happen to my daughter.

However, the data show that irrespective of their economic status most women do not agree with the dowry system. Some of the respondents were quite vehement in speaking against the dowry system. They felt that marriage with dowry is reduced to a mere commercial transaction. They feel that it is a

financial burden on parents who cannot afford it and is therefore a social evil. To illustrate this statement Mrs. Kar, aged 45, employed as an administrator, said:

> I am totally against the dowry system. I think it is primitive and more like a barter system where women are reduced to commodity. It is like buying and selling things which is very humiliating for women. I think when parents give equal education to their sons as well as daughters, why should they give dowry to their daughters? It is more sensible if parents educate their daughters so that they can be independent and earn their own living. This will help them from being dependent on anyone else.

Table 7.10 What is Your Attitude Towards Dowry as Giving Status?

(column percentages)

Dowry as gives status	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Yes	4	4
No	96	96
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 00$; d.f = 1; $p < 1.00$

Table 7.10 shows that hardly any of the respondents agree that the dowry system can give status to women. They feel that it is a burden on parents and that there are other means of increasing status in society. As Mrs. Talukdar, aged 32, employed as a technical assistant, said:

> I do not agree with the statement that dowry gives social status to women. I personally think it is degrading for women as marriage is reduced to a mere transaction where it is the bride's family who is the sufferer. For many people dowry has become the easiest way of acquiring wealth and they thereby think that it raises their status. I think it is a myth. Because you must be aware that irrespective of having brought dowries daughters-in-law are ill-treated which often leads to dowry deaths. Parents are driven to bankruptcy as they are forced by custom to pay huge dowry for their daughters' marriage.

Table 7.11 Are You Prepared to Give Dowry For Your Daughter?

(column percentages)

Prepared to give dowry	Employed women (N=50)	Non-Employed women (N=50)
Yes	2	0
No	54	62
Missing	44	38
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 1.49$; d.f = 2; $p < .47$

Note that 13 women did not have any children and 28 women did not have any daughters.

Table 7.11 shows a similar result. There were very few women from either groups who were prepared to give dowry for their daughters. Mrs. Kanungoe, aged 35 and employed, was totally against dowry:

> I have two daughters and I have decided I am not giving any dowry during either of their marriages. I will rather spend the money in educating them so that they can be independent and self reliant. This will also help them to be aware of all the social evils that exist in our society and voice their opinion against them. I feel if I pay exorbitant prices to marry them off it will make them indeed feel that they are inferior to their husbands. In the long run this will have negative effects on their marital relationships. Being a mother I do not want this to happen to my own children.

There was only one case of an employed woman who was willing to pay dowry for her daughter. Mrs. Talukdar, aged 42 and a librarian, said:

> You must be surprised that being an educated employed woman my attitude towards dowry is different than my colleagues. Well..... here is the story. I had an arranged marriage and my father could not give as much dowry as was expected by my in-laws. Soon after our marriage we moved into a joint family and I had a hard time in winning the love and affection of my in-laws. [Q. Could you please elaborate a little more on that?]. I was ill treated. The only reason being that I did not bring enough wealth for them . My in-laws are very conservative people. I have been working all through and helped them financially since then. After all these years their attitudes have slightly changed. It is only by making a lot of sacrifices that I have earned some respect in the family. I do not want

my daughter to go through all the pain and misery that I had to experience.

Sex-Role Attitudes Scale

As well as being examined individually the attitude items were combined into a scale. These items are: 'do you agree that women in our country should be encouraged to take up paid employment?', 'do you agree that capable women should be given higher position of authority over others at work?', 'do you agree that employment of women gives them higher status in society?', 'do you agree that women are entitled to employment even when their husbands can support the family? 'do you agree that women should have equal status with men in society?' 'do you agree that women have equal right to property with men?,' 'what is your attitude towards divorce as a solution for broken marriage?', and lastly 'what is your attitude towards widow remarriage?' The items on dowry was dropped from the scale because it has different response options from the other items.

The aim was to study whether sex-role attitudes in different areas differ or are consistent for women living in single-earner or dual-earner households. The responses are intended to assess attitudes on a traditional to modern continuum. Responses ranged from '1 to 4'. The lowest score of '1' is given to 'strongly disagree', a score of '2' is given to 'disagree', '3' to 'agree' and '4' to 'strongly agree'. The responses to these items are summed to create a scale ranging from '8 to 32'.

Table 7.12 Mean Scores on Sex Role Attitude Scale For Employed and Non-Employed Women

Sex Role Attitude Scale	Employed women N=50	Non-Employed women N=50	F ratio
Attitude to employment	29.3	28.8	.26
Attitude to position of authority	30.7	31.2	.67
Attitude to higher status	23.5	20.6	5.21*
Attitude to employment right	28.8	28.2	.43
Attitude to equal status	30.9	28.3	7.28#
Attitude to equal property right	30.2	28.3	4.03
Attitude to divorce	20.5	18.1	2.51
Attitude to widow remarriage	29.3	26.6	9.41#
Total/8	27.9	26.3	12.67

* $p < .05$,
# $p < .005$

Table 7.12 show that there is little difference between the attitudes of employed and non-employed women. Employed women have slightly more egalitarian attitudes than non-employed women but the difference is not statistically significant, except for the item on 'whether capable women should be given position of authority at their place of work'. More employed women disagree with the statement than non-employed women because they feel that sometimes women have too many responsibilities at home to take up a position of authority at work, even if they have the potential to do so. In such cases they feel that a man with equal potential should be given the responsibility. With regard to all the other issues, employed women have slightly more liberal and more modern views than non-employed women.

The Effect of Attitudes on the Division of Labour and Decision-Making

No study of attitudes is complete without examining the overall relationship between attitudes, domestic division of labour and decision-making. Changes in the domestic division of labour and decision-making within the family may affect the attitudes of women and vice-versa.

The correlation results as shown in Appendix B, Table 1, show no significant relationship between the attitude scale, the domestic division of labour scale and the decision-making scales.[8] For example, the correlation between 'sex role attitude scale' (totalatt) and 'indoor domestic division of labour scale' (inwkstat) is not significant (see Appendix B Table 1). Also there is no significant relationship between 'sex role attitude scale' and 'children centred decision-making scale' (rhwccdec) or with 'household decision-making scale' (rhwhhldc) (see Appendix B Table 1).

It is interesting to find out that all throughout the study there was no significant relationship between domestic division of labour, decision-making and sex role attitudes. An important explanation for this is that the traditional nature of the domestic division of labour and decision-making processes are deeply rooted in the culture of Indian society and it is not simply enough for people to change their attitudes towards these practices unless they apply them in their day-to-day practices. All members of society have to be taught to accept women as equally important and honoured members of society and should accord them equal status.

[8] The latter two scales have been discussed in detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

Correlations Between Independent Variables and Sex Role Attitudes

Studies have shown that several factors influence women to enter employment or to remain housewives. Among these factors the ones that seem to be important are socio-economic background variables like age, age of husbands, number of children, family type and head of the family, age at marriage, and type of marriage and some employment-background variables such as position at work and income from employment.

As seen in Chapter 6 the age of respondents or their husbands does not have any effect on their decision-making within the family. Likewise there is no correlation between age of respondents, age of husbands, and sex-role attitudes. In the qualitative interview Mrs. Talukdar aged 32, a technical assistant, said:

> Sex role attitudes are formed early in life and I don't think with age the attitudes of people change dramatically. About certain social issues I still think the same way as I used to 10 years back. [Q. Social issues like what?]. Say for example..... divorce, child marriage and so on. I did not agree with either divorce or child marriage 10 years back and my attitude towards them is still the same even today.

It is generally assumed that having larger numbers of children inhibit the adoption of modern attitudes towards women's employment outside the home. This study shows that there is some relationship between the number of children women have and issues regarding women's status in the society. Respondents with more children disagree that 'employment gives higher status to women' (significant at $p < .05$; see Appendix B Table 3). On the other hand women with fewer children are in favour of women's equal status in society. Mrs. Nandi aged, 43, employed, said:

> I think women should be given equal status in society. Both men and women are equally competitive and I think it is time now that we raise our voices against all the injustice that has taken place against us for so many years. It is the duty of all educated women to make their uneducated counterparts in the rural areas aware of this and to fight for a common cause which will help the entire society.

Another factor that can affect the sex-role attitudes of women is the type of family they live in. It was shown earlier that more employed than non-employed respondents live in joint families. The attitudes of women living in joint families may be affected by older men in the family. However, the respondents living in joint families are also the ones who work. The type of family they live in does not have any correlation with their sex-role attitudes, nor does whether they have servants or not.

However, the number of household members has an effect on women's attitude towards whether 'married women are entitled to employment even if their husbands can support the family'. The more members there are in the family, the less likely are women to agree with this statement (significant at $p < .05$; see Appendix B Table 3). Mrs. Acharya, aged 34, employed as a research assistant in a government organisation, said:

> If my husband was earning a lot and I had a house which had other people and was not so lonely I don't think I would work. It's because basically we need my income to have a moderately comfortable life that I have to continue with my job. The other reason is that as I live in a nuclear family, when my child goes to school and my husband to work I need something to occupy myself with.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, in India the age at which women are married may have an effect on their decision-making power. It may also affect their sex-role attitudes. The correlation results in Appendix A Table 3 show that the type

of marriage does not affect women's sex role attitudes but age at marriage has a significant correlation with the statement 'employment gives higher status to women in society' (significant at $p < .05$). The higher the age of marriage for women, the more egalitarian they are in their view towards 'employment raising the status of women'.

Employment of women exposes them to the outer world. They develop modern attitudes towards life in general and women's employment in particular. Does women's position at work, the nature of their job, their salary or the length of their job have any correlation to their attitudes?

The empirical results show that there is a significant correlation between position of women at work and the statement 'women should be given position of authority at work' (significant at $p < .01$; see Appendix B Table 3). The higher the position of women at work the more they agree that 'women should be given higher authority at their place of work'. Mrs. Sen Gupta aged 35, employed said:

> Being an employed woman I do encourage women to take up positions of authority at work. Because I know it can change ones status at work. I have had a position of authority at my place of work for some time now and once you are in a higher position people around you treat you differently. Though I work very long hours as my job is very demanding I get a little more sympathy and understanding from my husband and relatives than I would otherwise get had I not been in this high position. It also boosts up ones ego and hence I agree that capable women should definitely be given position of authority at their place of work.

At the same time the position of women at work has a positive correlation with statements like 'employment of women gives them higher status in society' (significant at $p < .01$). The higher the position of women, the more positive attitudes they have towards 'employment giving higher status to women' and 'widow remarriage' (significant at $p < .01$; see Appendix B Table 3). Whether

women supervise the work of others may also have an effect on their sex-role attitudes. The more women supervise others at work, the more egalitarian their views towards 'women should have equal status with men in society', and 'women should have equal right to property' (significant at $p < .05$; see Appendix A Table 3). These women also have more positive attitudes towards 'widow remarriage' (significant at $p < .05$; see Appendix A Table 3).

As expected, background variables like the salary of the respondents, the length of their job and whether they are satisfied with their job has an effect on their sex-role attitudes. The higher the income of women, the more they agree that 'employment gives higher status to women in society', that 'women should have equal status with men in society', (significant at $p < .05$); and that 'widow remarriage is acceptable' (significant at $p < .01$; see appendix B Table 3). Similarly the length of time women have been in employment affects their agreement with 'women should have equal status with men in society', 'women should have equal right to property', and 'approval towards widow remarriage' (all significant at $p < .05$; see Appendix B Table 3).

Women who started their job after the birth of their last child are more likely to have egalitarian attitudes. Satisfaction with paid employment is positively associated with the statements 'employment gives higher status to women' and 'approval towards widow remarriage' (significant at $p < .05$; see Appendix B Table 3). Women who are satisfied with their employment have more egalitarian attitudes towards social issues than their less satisfied counterparts.

In sum women who had a job before marriage, have higher income, supervise others at work, and are satisfied with their work have slightly more

egalitarian sex-role attitudes and are likely to adopt more modern attitudes in their own lives. On the whole, socio- economic background explains a small proportion of the difference in Bengali women's sex role attitudes according to their current employment status.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined differences in sex-role attitudes between employed and non-employed women. In general there is little support for the hypothesis that labour market experience leads women to have more modern attitudes towards issues of the family and society. Whether women are currently employed or not makes little difference to their attitudes. This lack of difference may be due to the way women in India cope with home and work responsibilities irrespective of their economic position. But it may also reflect the fact that all women in the sample are educated and belong to the middle-class, so are rather homogeneous in their social attitudes.

The data from the chapter show that there is no relationship between attitudes of women and domestic division of labour and decision-making in families. Though women agree that men should help them more with their housework and they should also be given the authority to take final decisions, in reality they (especially non-employed women) cannot do much to change the existing situation.

CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The main aim of this thesis has been to study the effect of white-collar employment on gender equality within families of middle-class Bengali women. Since my research question concerned whether employment has brought about gender equality within families of women I undertook a comparative study of the domestic lives of employed and non-employed women. To do this I studied the domestic division of labour, decision making processes among couples and sex-role attitudes in both groups of women. Thus employment is considered as an independent variable and the aim has been to examine its effects on gender equality within families.

The study was conducted in Calcutta with a sample of 50 employed and 50 non-employed women. Since the study was based only in only one city and the sample size is small it is not possible to draw conclusions about women in India generally. Future research should be extended to include different communities and larger samples to make more meaningful generalisations about Indian women.

The present study was concerned with the following questions:

- Does paid employment bring about changes in the domestic division of labour between husbands and wives? Is there a more egalitarian division of labour in-dual earner households than in single-earner households?

- Does paid employment bring about changes in the decision-making process between husbands and wives? Is there a more egalitarian decision-making pattern in dual earner households than in single earner households?

- Does paid employment bring about changes in the attitudes of employed women? Are employed women more modern in their attitudes to different social issues than non-employed women?

The fast-growing middle class in West Bengal provided an ideal group for a sociological study of this nature. Despite its growing population and changes in the position of women within this group, it has not been a major focus of study for sociologists in India. Research in India on middle-class employed women in white-collar jobs has been sparse and uneven, and there has been no work at all on middle-class women in white-collar jobs in Calcutta. In addition I decided to study the Bengali community because it is one of the largest communities in India.

Summary

One main conclusion that I draw from the previous research on Indian women is that these studies on the lives of employed women suffer from certain methodological shortcomings. In methodological terms samples have been purposive and have included women only in white-collar employment or non-employed women. Few studies have systematically established the relationship between a wife's employment and other dependent variables such as decision-making, sharing of household work (including child care) and the degree of personal freedom of employed wives.

Another important conclusion drawn from these previous studies is that the major changes in the lives of employed women within the family are not uniform throughout India. There is still a hiatus between a woman's potential rights and privileges as acknowledged legally, and the actual rights and privileges that she enjoys in a practical sense. In principle women have equal status with men, but in day-to-day life this is not always the case. In rural areas in particular, the traditional role of a woman as a home maker and socialiser of the young remains unaltered, despite the fact that many women add to their role a new dimension: that of economic support. In order to fill these gaps this study has endeavoured to adopt a broader perspective by studying both employed and non-employed women belonging to one particular class, community and religion.

The findings in Chapter 5 show that irrespective of whether middle-class Bengali women in Calcutta are in paid employment or not, they continue to do the bulk of the domestic labour. A clear gender division of labour remains within the household. There have been very few changes in the domestic division of labour. Cooking is clearly recognised to be demanding work. In Bengali society, food preparation is by far the most arduous chore to be confronted every day. For most women it takes up to at least 3 hours a day, with a longer session in the morning before leaving for work and a shorter session in the evening. Two full cooked meals are provided every day and if possible school-children and husbands take cooked packed lunches from home. As a result the data in this chapter showed that both employed and non-employed women spend most of their 'spare' time in cooking.

All women in my sample were married and most of them had children. The qualitative data show that such mothers, both employed and non-employed, saw themselves primarily as 'housewives', with their roles as wives and mothers being most important. They define their main work in the household as being connected with food and child care. Both employed and non-employed women to a certain extent rely on other female family members or female servants for help with certain household work rather than their husbands. The employed mother of a young child is mainly concerned with its physical and emotional well-being. If she cannot make satisfactory substitute arrangements in her absence, her feelings of anxiety and guilt are aggravated.

There are no major differences in the domestic lives of employed and non-employed middle-class Bengali women in relation to child care and housework responsibilities. A very traditional pattern of household tasks and divisions persist even in dual-earner families. On the whole there were no families of employed women which had more egalitarian division of labour in household chores than is the case among non-employed women. Moreover, because more employed women live in joint families, they do not employ more servants than non-employed women. So they often carry a greater domestic burden than non-employed women.

In sum, my conclusion from this chapter is that the allocation of the division of household tasks in Bengali households between husbands and wives is clearly gender-specific. I have shown that women, irrespective of their economic position, do the more laborious mundane 'indoor household tasks' like cooking,

cleaning up after meals and cleaning the house. Men do more 'outdoor household tasks' like house maintenance and grocery shopping.

Though 'outdoor household tasks' are important, they are more discretionary in nature whereas 'indoor household tasks' are less discretionary and cannot easily be adjusted to the availability of time. For example, the repair or painting of a window can be postponed depending on the availability of time but the evening dinner cannot be put off. As far as child care is concerned, women do the repetitive work of dressing, feeding and getting children to bed and thus spend more time in child care, whereas husbands do the less repetitive tasks like playing with children and helping them with their home work. These results parallel many of those found in studies of the domestic division of labour in western societies (Dempsey 1992; Baxter 1993)

In this thesis I have established that time-consuming patterns of household chores still prevail in most middle-class Bengali households. There is little easing of the burden of work for the housewife employed outside the home. She is still as heavily burdened with housework as her non-employed counterpart. At the same time domestic work remains largely unrecognised as real work.

In addition the employment of women has had little effect on the amount of *time* spent on domestic work. Women continue to spend more time on 'indoor household tasks'. On average employed women spend 40-45 hours per week on their paid job and in addition devote another 24 hours to housework per week, whereas non-employed women spend 20 hours in total on housework. In child care too, employed women spend more time than their non-employed

counterparts. This is mostly because in this sample the employed women have younger children than the non-employed women.

Women's employment is also related to family composition. Child care is still largely viewed as a woman's responsibility. As employed women are away from their homes for most of the day 46 per cent of them prefer to live in joint families, mainly because the problem of child care is resolved to a certain extent in such families: they have someone to look after their children. Of the employed women with small children who lived in joint families 50 per cent of them had mothers-in law or sisters-in-law to take care of their children. On the other hand, 70 per cent of non-employed women lived in nuclear families and could take care of their children themselves.

An important conclusion that can be drawn from this chapter is that the domestic division of labour in Bengali families depend on the structure of the households in which women live. Women living in extended families may receive some child care from other members of the family but they do more household tasks as they have larger families to look after. On the other hand, this situation is the reverse with women living in nuclear families. These findings are different from the studies conducted in Western societies because most people in the West live in nuclear families irrespective of whether they are employed or not.

Chapter 6 examined whether employed women experience a more egalitarian decision-making process in their households than non-employed women. In particular the qualitative data in this chapter reveal marked gender-specific differences in decision-making in some areas of family life in Bengali households. Although in the quantitative data women report that decisions are

made jointly, results from the in-depth interviews show that husbands tend to exercise final control over the more important decisions such as buying property or car or the schooling or career of children and so on.

The qualitative data show that decision-making in patriarchal societies is husband-dominated. Despite outside employment there were very few women who took independent decisions on household matters. Rather, they took decisions in consultation with their husbands. The fact that employed women also make financial contributions to the family budget does lead to a small change in their domestic power. Rather their salary is used to negotiate their status within the dependency relationship with their husbands but not to challenge it (Chanana 1988; Gupta 1994). My findings from the qualitative data show that women often make more routine decisions like what to cook for dinner, what groceries to buy and so on. Children centred decisions such as their schooling and career are also made by husbands with some discussion with their wives. However, more employed than non-employed women take part in the discussion.

This study shows that despite the fact that employed women have decision-making power at their place of work they do not enjoy similar power within their own homes. Power relationships within the family remain largely unaltered. There seems to be little direct relationship between the earning status of women and their power to make independent family decisions. Women's paid work has become more like their other feminine obligations - taken for granted within their own families. Thus, employed women in most cases enjoy only marginal consideration for the additional income they bring home.

The data suggest that families have made little progression towards egalitarianism. This is shown by the fact that husbands still continue to exercise more power and authority in the family. This comes out most clearly in the qualitative data. The quantitative data suggest some increase in equality between men and women but the ultimate power still rests with husbands. Irrespective of whether women live in joint or nuclear families, there is not much difference in the degree of gender equality within families.

Chapter 7 investigated whether employment brings about changes in the sex-role attitudes of women, specifically, whether employed women were more egalitarian in their attitudes than non-employed women. However, the results showed that there is no significant difference in such attitudes between employed and non-employed women. Attitudinal patterns among women from the same class appear to be remarkably similar. Despite some changes in women's attitudes, traditional customs prevail and shape the domestic lives of most middle-class Bengali women even today. Marriage, children and family still occupy important positions in the lives of Bengali women.

Although the quantitative data suggest that there have been some changes in the traditional sex-role attitudes the in-depth interviews suggest more clearly that most changes seem to be affecting attitudes rather than actions in the domestic sphere. Even today Bengali women are still uneasy in sharing the domestic division of labour, (especially household work) with their husbands. When it comes to household tasks it is women who do most of the work even though they prefer some help. In India, by going out to work women have taken two jobs and this situation appears to be changing only very gradually.

Why Has There Been So Little Domestic Change?

The lack of difference in attitudes between both groups of women, and the generally modern attitudes, raise further questions. Why do traditional patterns of labour and decision-making still continue in Bengali households? The following discussion probes into this question.

The patriarchal nature of Indian society, including Bengali society, does not allow women to have independence in the domestic sphere. Often it is up to the husbands or the in-laws to decide whether wives should take up paid employment. Certain notions and convictions (for example men as the breadwinner and women as housewives) are deeply embedded in the minds of people. Ramu (1989) writes:

> The religious values and training, a discriminatory economic system, and a biased legal system nourish and sustain patriarchy in modern India. They also provide the necessary context to understand and appreciate the reasons for the failure of the new economic status of women to bring about even marginal changes in their lives. As long as these contextual factors remain unchanged, the superior position of husbands in families in general and dual-earner families in particular is well insured. And, thus, the stratification based on gender continues (Ramu 1989:194).

Though Bengali women are increasingly entering paid employment, in the domestic sphere household tasks are allocated to them by their husbands, and by older members of their families if they live in joint households. As a result traditional patterns of the gender division of labour continue. Husbands resist housework, chores which are considered 'feminine' in Bengali society.

In a strict patriarchal society, even today few women have been able to shed their traditional customs and incorporate egalitarian relations in the family.

The cultural values, norms and ethos of the Bengali middle class are still rooted in tradition. Old values are internalised and serve as guidelines for the functioning of the family and society. In Bengali society paid employment for women is more accepted if it is financially necessary for the family. Ramu's (1989) study shows that 'the powerful influence of religion in shaping and pruning femininity cannot be ignored in "secular India"' (Ramu 1989:193).

In decision-making too, though most women agree that women should be allowed to take part in decisions concerning the family, in reality they exercise very little power. Though the quantitative data show that they are included in the discussion of decision-making the interviews show that the ultimate power rests with the husbands. The respondents themselves reported in the interviews that decision-making in important matters is an exclusively male domain in every family. Though women are aware of this situation they accept it without much opposition for fear of causing marital conflict. Most women do not agree that job opportunities are more important for men, and that women should marry, stay at home and allow their husbands to make the major family decisions. However, they do not attempt to change their present subordinate position within the family for fear of marital conflict. They know that only a stable marriage and family can give them security.

Family security is cherished by women in Indian society because of the problems associated with being single. In India the lives of divorced, separated or single women are not easy. It is difficult to get a divorce under the Indian system. It is also difficult to obtain maintenance from the husband. It is not easy to ascertain his income unless he is a salaried employee. As a result, in most cases

the woman is forced to return to her maternal home where she is often not welcome. There are no hostels for her (especially if she is not employed); nor is there any support from the state. Because of these social and structural barriers, women are not prepared to make choices which may break or end their marriages.

Bengali men generally prefer wives who are traditional in their attitudes and behaviour. They prefer women who are educated and earning but not too independent and ambitious. Marriage, a universal norm in India, acts as a structural barrier to women fighting strongly against gender inequality within families. Even today a woman is expected to get married, settle down and have a well-defined monogamous relationship with only one man. Arranged marriages are still prevalent in Bengali society. Women fear that their emancipation may have negative repercussions in their lives.

For a woman in India, where marriage is universal and residence patrilocal, it is important that her in-laws are supportive to her. Only then can she gradually try to bring about gender equality within her family. Married employed women are often viewed with disapproval by older members of the family, especially their in-laws. They find fault with their household tasks and child care easily and often (Debi 1988; Ramu 1989; Bagwe 1995). Under such circumstances, if women want to even consider bringing about gender equality within families, they have to have tremendous support from their husbands and children. They have to convince the other members of the family that they are neither inconvenienced nor neglected because of the employment of their wives or mothers.

Women's movement into paid labour will bring gender equality in their lives only if they start gaining more power within the family as a result of their economic independence. There is little evidence to support the view that much has changed in the domestic lives of middle-class Bengali women. Though the attitudes of women may be more egalitarian than in previous generations, traditional arrangements of domestic life are still prevalent in Bengali households.

In Bengali society, it is not easy for women to overcome structural barriers and secure gender equality within families. Structural arrangements along gender lines control the domestic lives of both employed and non-employed women. Without wider support they cannot change the social value that women should have a secondary position in the family, a view inculcated from childhood.

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Appendix A

Table 1 Description of Independent Variables

Independent variables	Definition of independent variables
Age group of respondents (Agegrp)	Age of respondents is grouped into 4 items 1 = 25-29 years 2 = 30-34 years 3 = 35-39 years 4 = 40-45 years
Age group of husbands (Agehusb)	Age of husbands is grouped into 4 items 1 = 20-29 years 2 = 30-39 years 3 = 40-49 years 4 = 50-59 years
Number of children (Nokid)	Number of children is grouped into 4 items 0 = no children 1 = one child 2 = two children 3 = three children
Type of family (Famtype)	Type of family is grouped into 3 items 1 = joint 2 = extended 3 = nuclear
Head of the family (Famhead)	Head of the family is grouped into 8 items 0 = self 1 = father 3 = mother 4 = husband 5 = father-in-law 6 = mother-in-law 7 = brother-in-law
Number of household members (Hmembers)	Number of household members is 1 item that is the actual number of persons in the household
Bank account (Bankac)	Separate bank account of respondents is grouped into 2 items 1 = yes 2 = no
Whether there are servants (Servants)	Whether the respondents have any servants is grouped into 2 items 1 = yes 2 = no
Age at marriage	Age at marriage of the respondents is 1 item

(Agemarry)	that is the age at which they got married
Marriage type (Mrtype)	Marriage type of respondents is grouped into 2 items 1 = arranged marriage 2 = love marriage
Position of women at work (Position)	Position of women at work is grouped into 4 items 0 = not applicable 1 = non management employee 2 = supervisor 3 = lower manager
Inspect work (Inspect)	Supervise work of other employees is grouped into 3 items 0 = not applicable 1 = yes 2 = no
Salary of respondents (Income)	Salary of respondents is grouped into 7 items 0 = not applicable 1 = below Rs 2,000 2 = Rs 2,001-Rs 4,000 3 = Rs 4,001-Rs 6,000 4 = Rs 6,001-Rs 8,000 5 = Rs 8,001-Rs 10,000 6 = Rs 10,001-Rs 12,000
Start job (Startjob)	Started working is grouped into 5 items 0 = not applicable 1 = before marriage 2 = after marriage 3 = after first child 4 = after last child
Job satisfaction (Jsatisfy)	Job as a major source of satisfaction in life has been grouped into 5 items 0 = not applicable 1 = definitely 2 = possibly 3 = probably not 4 = definitely not

Table 2 Definition of Decision-Making Variables

Dependent variables	Definition of dependent variables
Household goods purchase (Dchhpur)	Decision to purchase household goods is grouped into 4 items 1 = husband 2 = self/husband jointly 3 = self 4 = missing
Property purchase (Dcpropur)	Decision to purchase property is grouped into 4 items 1 = husband 2 = self/husband jointly 3 = self 4 = missing
Children's school (Dckidscl)	Decision on children's school is grouped into 4 items 1 = husband 2 = self/husband jointly 3 = self 4 = missing
Have children (Dchavkid)	Decision to have children is grouped into 4 items 1 = husband 2 = self/husband jointly 3 = self 4 = missing
No more children (Lastkid)	Decision about when to have no more children is grouped into 4 items 1 = husband 2 = self/husband jointly 3 = self 4 = missing

Table 3 Correlations Between Independent Variables and Decision-Making

	Agegr	Agehus	Nokid	Famtype	Famhead	Hmemb	Bankac	Servant
Dchhgpur	.24*	.21*	.12	-.02	-.09	-.12	-.18	-.12
Dcpropur	.01	.01	.00	.03	-.00	-.04	.01	-.08
Dchavekid	.07	.02	.11	.11	.24	.00	-.17	.02
Dckidscl	.03	.09	.13	.06	-.08	-.04	.06	-.00
Lastkid	.02	.00	.18	-.01	.01	.05	-.02	.02

Significance level = * p < .05 ** p < .01

Table 3 Correlations Between Independent Variables and Decision-Making (Continued)

	Agemarry	Mrtype	Position	Inspect	Salary	Startjob	Jsatisfy
Dchhgpur	-.11	.06	-.05	-.08	-.02	-.06	-.03
Dcpropur	.11	-.03	.07	.01	-.08	-.04	.12
Dchavekid	-.00	.12	.04	.08	.01	.05	.15
Dckidscl	-.21*	-.15	-.10	-.14	-.06	-.06	-.09
Lastkid	.00	.04	.03	-.05	.06	.08	.05

Significance level = * p < .05 ** p < .01

Appendix B

Table 1 Correlation Between Attitude Scale, Domestic Division of Labour Scale and Decision-Making Scale

	Totalatt	Inwkstat	Rhwccdec	Rhwhhldc
Totalatt	1.00			
Inwkstat	.08	1.00		
Rhwccdec	.05	.09	1.00	
Rhwhhldc	-.13	.26	.19	1.00

Table 2 Definition of Sex Role Attitudes Variables*

Dependent variables	Definition of dependent variables
Women should be encouraged to work (Womwkatt)	Women should be encouraged to work is grouped into 4 items 1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = agree 4 = strongly agree
Job authority (Womjhatt)	Women should be given job authority is grouped into 4 items 1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = agree 4 = strongly agree
Married women are entitled to employment (Mwmematt)	Married women are entitled to employment even when their husbands can support the family is grouped into 4 items 1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = agree 4 = strongly agree
Employment gives higher status to women (wkhstatt)	Employment gives higher status to women is grouped into 4 items 1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = agree 4 = strongly agree
Women should have equal status (Wmeqstatt)	Women should have equal status with men in society is grouped into 4 items 1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = agree 4 = strongly agree
Women should have equal property right (Eqprratt)	Women should have equal right to property is grouped into 4 items 1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = agree 4 = strongly agree
Attitude towards divorce (Divapatt)	Attitude towards divorce is grouped into 4 items 1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = agree 4 = strongly agree

Attitude towards widow remarriage (Wirapatt)	Attitude towards widow remarriage is grouped into 4 items 1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = agree 4 = strongly agree
Attitude towards dowry (dowryatt)	Attitude towards dowry is grouped into 4 items 1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = agree 4 = strongly agree

* As the independent variable definition for the correlation tables of chapter 7 is exactly the same as that of Chapter 6 I have not defined them again.

Table 3 Correlations Between Independent Variables and Sex Role Attitudes

	Agegr	Agehus	Nokid	Famtype	Famhead	Hmemb	Bankac	Servant
Womwkatt	-.09	.00	-.04	.08	-.01	-.13	-.15	-.03
Womjhatt	-.15	-.06	-.04	.02	.09	-.00	-.12	.05
Mwmematt	-.09	-.08	-.09	.17	-.05	-.19*	-.12	-.13
Wkhsatt	-.07	-.09	-.21*	-.07	-.05	-.12	.05	-.13
Wmeqsatt	.05	-.03	.09	-.07	.08	.14	-.18	.07
Eqprratt	-.04	-.09	.02	-.09	.04	.13	-.16	.08
Divapatt	.12	.15	.04	-.03	.02	.02	-.07	.01
Wirapatt	-.01	-.03	-.03	-.03	.02	.04	-.21*	.00
Dowryatt	.02	-.01	.09	-.02	.04	-.03	.02	-.03

Significance level = * p < .05 ** p < .01

Table 3 Correlations Between Independent Variables and Sex Role Attitudes

(Continued)

	Agemarry	Mrtype	Position	Inspect	Salary	Startjob	Jsatisfy
Womwkatt	.03	.02	-.04	.09	-.01	.08	.03
Womjhatt	-.14	.06	.28**	.04	-.18	-.02	.01
Mwmematt	.08	.01	.04	.08	. 07	.02	-.03
Wkhsatt	.23*	.09	.27**	.13	.23*	.11	.20*
Wmeqsatt	.09	.06	.15	.24*	.24*	.23*	.16
Eqprratt	.01	.14	.05	.22*	.14	.22*	.14
Divapatt	.02	-.04	-.03	.16	.10	.19	.18
Wirapatt	.03	.10	.27**	.04	.28**	.20*	.23*
Dowryatt	.06	-.13	-.01	.03	-.02	.01	-.01

Significance level = * p < .05 ** p < .01

APPENDIX C*

CONFIDENTIAL

WOMEN AND FAMILY SURVEY

(A)

THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

AUSTRALIA

*Note: I have not included in the appendices the questionnaire (B) which was distributed to non-employed women because the two questionnaires were identical in every section apart from the section on employment.

SCREENING SCHEDULE

My name is Mousumee Dutta and I am from the Sociology Program, Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University. I am conducting research on the changing status of Hindu married women in relation to education and employment in Calcutta. Do you have time to answer a few questions about your current situation?

The data will be kept strictly confidential and will be used for no purpose other than that of research.

Your co-operation and help is highly appreciated. Thank you very much.

Mousumee Dutta

Education:
Do you have at least a graduate degree? If not terminate.

1) Yes
2) No

If yes, what kind of degree do you have?

1) Graduate (Pass)
2) Graduate (Honours)
3) Masters
4) PhD

Marital status (only married). If not terminate.
Are you currently

1) Married
2) Unmarried
3) Never married
4) Divorced/separated/widowed

Religion (only Hindus). If not terminate.
What is your religion?

1) Hindu
2) Christian
3) Muslim
4) Any other: _____

Would you be prepared to be involved in this survey of the status of women in India?

1) Yes
2) No

PLEASE READ THIS

I am interested in the kind of work you do, the things you do at home and your views on social issues that affect the way of life of women in India.

Most of the questions can be answered by circling a letter. Here is an example of how to answer a question like the ones that you will find in the questionnaire.

Where were you born?
a) Calcutta
b) Other part of West Bengal
c) East Bengal
d) Delhi
e) Bombay
f) Madras
g) Other (Please specify)
_____

If the answer is 'Calcutta', circle a.

Please read each question carefully and answer as accurately as you can. It is very important to answer all questions that apply to you.

I am also interested in any additional comments you would like to make on the issues raised. Please feel free to include these on the last page of the questionnaire.

The data will be kept strictly confidential and will be used only for research.

Thank you very much for helping with the study. I appreciate you taking the time to complete the questionnaire.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH

SECTION A: PERSONAL DETAILS

First I would like to ask you some questions about yourself.

A 1. When were you born? year _____

A 2. Where were you born?

a) Calcutta
b) Other part of West Bengal
c) East Bengal
d) Delhi
e) Bombay
f) Madras
g) Other (Please specify) _____

A 3. Have you ever had any children?

- Include those living with you as well as any living somewhere else.
- Include natural, adopted and step children.

a) Yes
b) No

A 4. Do any live with you?

a) Yes
b) No

A 5.How many of your children live with you? Please specify number._____

A 6. What is the sex and age of those children who live with you?

(Please circle M or F and write in the age for each child.)

Male/Female	Age	Year born

Child 1	M	F	_____
Child 2	M	F	_____
Child 3	M	F	_____
Child 4	M	F	_____
Child 5	M	F	_____
Child 6	M	F	_____

A 7. Including you, how many people are living in your household?

_____persons

A 8. Could you give me some details about each of the people in your household?

Persons	Sex M/F	Age	Relationship to you	Employed/unemployed
For eg	F	35	Sister	Employed
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

A 9. When did you receive your degree?

Year: _____
What university was that?
_____

A 10. What was your goal behind taking up College education? Please circle all that apply to you.

a) Wanted to pursue studies
b) Wanted to take up a job
c) Wanted to meet people
c) Did not want to be a housewife
d) Did not have anything better to do

A 11. What is your husband's highest educational qualification?

a) High School
b) Higher Secondary
c) Graduate
d) Post Graduate
e) Other (Please specify) _____

A 12. In what year were you married?.

year _____

A 13. When was your husband born?.

year _____

A 14. Did you have an arranged marriage or a love marriage?

a) Arranged
b) Love

A 15. Are you a member of any trade union?

a) Yes
b) No

If yes, nature of membership

a) President
b) Secretary
c) Treasurer
d) Committee member
e) Ordinary member

A 16. How active are you in trade union activities?

a) Very active
b) Active
c) Passive
d) Don't participate at all

A 17. Are you a member of any cultural organisation?

a) Yes

b) No

A 18. If yes, please give name of organisation (s)

_____

_____

A 19. If yes, nature of membership

a) President
b) Secretary
c) Treasurer
d) Committee member
e) Ordinary member

A 20. How active are you in the organisation activities?

a) Very active
b) Active
c) Passive
d) Don't participate at all

SECTION B: EMPLOYMENT

B 1. In what year did you start working? month_____ year_____

B 2. Did you take up employment because .....Circle all that apply.

a) You wanted to be independent.
b) You did not want to be a housewife
c) You wanted to use your educational qualifications
d) To make money
e) To meet people
f) Did not have anything better to do

B 3. Did you start working ...

a) Before marriage
b) After marriage
c) After the birth of the first child
d) After the birth of the last child

B 4. What is your job title?

If you have several jobs, I am interested in your main job. Give full title, for example: upper division clerk, accountant, accounts officer etc.

_____

_____

_____

B 5. What are your major duties or activities (Please describe as fully as possible).

_____

_____

_____

B 6. What kind of organisation do you work in? That is what does it do? Describe as fully as possible:

_____

_____

B 7. About how many hours per week do you usually work on this job?

_____(hours)

B 8. When did you start working for your present employer?

_____(month) _____(year)

B 9. Since you started working for this employer, have you changed your position or job?

a) If yes, When did you begin working in your present position or job?

_____(month) _____(year)

b) If no go to **B 11**

B 10. Since you first started working for your present employer, have you .....

a) Been promoted to a higher job level with more authority or responsibility.
b) Stayed at the same job level you started at.

B 11. Think about the other people at your workplace who have much the same kind of job as you. How many are likely to get promoted to a higher level of job with more authority or responsibility?

a) Almost all of them
b) About half of them
c) About one quarter
d) Less than one quarter
e) None of them
f) No one at the same level as me

B 12. What would you say are your chances of being promoted to a higher level job with more authority or responsibility at your present place of work?

a) Almost certain to be promoted
b) There's a good chance but its far from certain
c) Pretty unlikely
d) Almost no chance

B 13. In your job, who decides about each of the following activities, either officially or unofficially (Please circle one number for each statement).

	I decide on my own	Someone else decides for me	Joint decision between me someone else
When to come to work	1	2	3
To take a day off work without claiming sick leave, losing pay or having to make the time up in some other way	1	2	3
To considerably slow down your pace of work for a day when you want to	1	2	3
To introduce a new task or work assignment that you will do on your job	1	2	3

B 14. How easy is it for someone in authority to check on your work?

a) Very easy
b) Fairly easy
c) Fairly hard
d) Very hard

B 15. How often does someone in authority check on your work?

a) Never
b) Less than once a week
c) About once a week
d) Several times a week
e) About once a day
f) More than once a day

B 16. As an official part of your present job, do you supervise the work of other employees or tell other employees what work to do?

a) Yes
b) No

B 17 How would you describe your position at work?

a) Non management employee
b) Supervisor
c) Lower manager
d) Middle manager
e) Top/upper manager

B 18. Would you say that your work is a major source of satisfaction in your life?

a) Yes, definitely
b) Yes, possibly
c) Probably not
d) Definitely not

B 19. If you had a reasonable income without working, would you.....

a) Still like to have a paid job Yes No
b) Not bother to have a paid job Yes No

B 20. What is your monthly income from your employment?

a) Below Rs 2,000
b) Rs 2,000 - Rs 4,000
c) Rs 4,001 - Rs 6,000
d) Rs 6,001 - Rs 8,000
e) Rs 8,001 - Rs 10,000
f) Rs 10,001 -Rs 12,000
e) Rs 12,000 and above

B 21. Do you personally have any income from any other source? If so, how much?

1) Yes
a) Rs 500- Rs 1,000
b) Rs 1,001- Rs 1,500
c) Rs 1,501- Rs 2,000
d) Rs 2,001- Rs 2,500
e) Rs 2,501- Rs 3000

f) Rs 3,001- Rs 3,500
g) Rs 3,501- Rs 4,000
h) Rs 4,001- Rs 4,500
i) Rs 4,501- Rs 5,000
j) Rs 5,001- Rs 5,500
k) Rs 5,501- Rs 6,000

2) No other income

B 22. Do you have a separate bank account to your husband?

a) Yes
b) No

B 23. What is your husband's monthly income from all sources?

a) Below Rs 2,000
b) Rs 2,001 - Rs 4,000
c) Rs 4,001 - Rs 6,000
d) Rs 6,0001-Rs 8,000
e) Rs 8,001 - Rs 10,000
f) Rs 10,000 and above

B 24. What is your husband's monthly income from his employment?

a) Below Rs 2,000
b) Rs 2,001 - Rs 4,000
c) Rs 4,001 - Rs 6,000
d) Rs 6,001 - Rs 8,000
e) Rs 8,001 - Rs 10,000
f) Rs 10,001 -Rs 12,000
e) Rs 12,000 and above

B 25. What is your husband's occupation? Please provide as much detail as possible.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

B 26. About how many hours per week does your husband usually work on his job?
_____(hours)

B 27. Was your mother ever in employment?

a) Yes
b) No

B 28. If yes, for how long was she in paid employment?
_____(years)

B 29. If yes, please describe what kind of job she did.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

SECTION C: YOUR FAMILY

C 1. Do you live in a?

a) Joint family

b) Extended family
c) Nuclear family

C 2. Who is the head of the family?

a) Self
b) Father
c) Mother
d) Husband
e) Father-in-law
f) Mother- in law
g) Brother-in-law
h) Others (Please specify) _____

C 3. Does your family keep a servant?

a) Yes -------> i) Full-time ii) Part-Time iii) Both
b) No

C 4. How many servants does your family have (including part-time and full-time)?

_____

C 5. Who usually performs the following tasks (If any items are not relevant circle not applicable).

	Self	Self and husband equally	Husband	Others	Not Applicable
Prepares the meals	1	2	3	4	5
Cleans up after meals	1	2	3	4	5
Shops for groceries	1	2	3	4	5
Cleans the house	1	2	3	4	5
Does the ironing	1	2	3	4	5
Takes care of house maintenance for example paying electricity bills, telephone bills etc	1	2	3	4	5

C 6. Could you indicate how much time you spend on the following household tasks in an average week?

Hours you spend each week

a) Preparing meals_____
b) Cleaning and washing after meals_____
c) Shopping for groceries _____
d) Cleaning the house _____
e) Doing the ironing _____
f) House maintenance_____

C 7. Do you think that your husband could help you more in household duties?

a) Yes
b) No

C 8. How satisfied are you with the division of household work between you and your husband?

a) Very satisfied
b) Somewhat satisfied
c) Somewhat dissatisfied
d) Very dissatisfied

COMPLETE THIS NEXT SECTION ONLY IF YOU HAVE CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 10 LIVING AT HOME.

C 9. Could you indicate how many hours you spend on the following child care tasks in a day?

Hours you spend each day

a) Feeding the children_____
b) Bathing and dressing_____
c) Getting children to bed _____
d) Helping children with homework _____

C 10. Who spends the most amount of time on child care tasks?

a) Self
b) Husband
c) Other (Please specify) _____

C 11. Do you think that your husband could help you more with the child care duties?

a) Yes
b) No

C 12. How satisfied are you with the division of child care tasks between you and your husband?

a) Very satisfied
b) Somewhat satisfied
c) Somewhat dissatisfied
d) Very dissatisfied

C 13. Who usually looks after your children in your absence?

a) Husband
b) Servant
c) Relations
d) They are left alone
e) Child care service outside household
f) No regular arrangement

C 14. Are you satisfied with this arrangement for looking after your children?

a) Very satisfied
b) Somewhat satisfied
c) Somewhat dissatisfied
d) Very dissatisfied

C 15. Do you feel that your relationship with your husband has been affected in anyway owing to your working outside? Please mention both positive and negative effects.

a) Yes
b) No, **GO TO Q C 16**

If yes, in what ways
Positive effects_____
_____
_____
_____

Negative effects_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

C 16. Do you feel that your relationship with your children has been affected in anyway owing to your working outside? Please mention both positive and negative effects

a) Yes
b) No, **GO TO Q C 18**

C 17. If yes, in what ways
Positive effects_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Negative effects_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

C 18. Does your husband approve or disapprove of you working outside the home?

a) Strongly disapproves
b) Disapproves
c) Approves
d) Strongly approves

C 19. Do your in-laws approve or disapprove of you working outside the home?

a) Strongly disapprove
b) Disapprove
c) Approve
d) Strongly approve

PLEASE ANSWER ALL THE QUESTIONS IN THIS SECTION

C 20. In your family who makes the final decisions on the following?

	Husband	husband and self jointly	Self	others (specify)
a. Purchase of property	1	2	3	4
b. Purchase of household goods e.g. fridge, T.V	1	2	3	4
c. What school children should attend	1	2	3	4

C 21. In your family who spends the family income on major purchases?

a) Husband
b) Husband and self jointly
c) Self
d) Head of the family
e) Others (please specify) _____

C 22. When making major decisions do you think that husband's should have absolute superiority?

a) Strongly disagree
b) Disagree
c) Agree
e) Strongly agree

ANSWER C 23 TO C 25 ONLY IF YOU HAVE CHILDREN.

C 23. In your family who decided about the number of children you would like to have?

a) Husband
b) Husband and self jointly
c) Self
d) Other (please specify) _____

C 24. In your family who decide about preferred sex of the child you would like to have?

a) Husband
b) Husband and self jointly
c) Self
d) Other (please specify) _____

C 25. In your family who decided to have no more children?

a) Husband
b) Husband and self jointly
c) Self
d) Other (please specify) _____

SECTION D: ATTITUDE TOWARDS WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT AND STATUS

D 1. Do you agree that women in India should be encouraged to take up paid employment outside the home?

a) Strongly disagree
b) Disagree
c) Agree
d) Strongly agree

D 2. Do you agree that capable women should be given positions of authority over others at their place of work?

a) Strongly disagree
b) Disagree
c) Agree
d) Strongly agree

D 3. Do you think that women are entitled to employment even when their husbands can support the family?

a) Strongly disagree
b) Disagree
c) Agree
d) Strongly agree

D 4. Do you agree that wives can legitimately claim to take part in the decision making process?

a) Strongly disagree
b) Disagree
c) Agree
d) Strongly agree

D 5. Do you agree that employed wives should have more say than non-employed wives in the family decision making process?

a) Strongly Disagree
b) Disagree
c) Agree
d) Strongly agree

D 6. Do you agree that women should have equal status with men in society?

a) Strongly Disagree
b) Disagree
c) Agree
d) Strongly agree

D 7. Do you agree that employment of women gives them higher status in society?

a) Strongly Disagree
b) Disagree
c) Agree
d) Strongly agree

D 8. Do you consider that the dowry system gives status to a woman?

a) Yes
b) No

D 9. What is your attitude towards the dowry system?

a) Strongly disagree
b) Disagree
c) Agree
d) Strongly agree

D 10. If you have a daughter would you be prepared to give dowry for her marriage?

a) Yes
b) No

D 11. In your family who will select marriage partners for your children? (Answer only if you have children).

a) Parent's selection
b) Individual selection

D 12. What is your attitude towards divorce as a solution for a broken marriage?

a) Strongly disagree
b) Disagree
c) Agree
d) Strongly agree

D 13. What is your attitude towards widow remarriage?

a) Strongly disagree
b) Disagree
c) Agree
d) Strongly agree

D 14. Do you agree that women should have equal rights to property with men?

a) Strongly disagree
b) Disagree
c) Agree
d) Strongly agree

D 15. Any additional comments you would like to make on the issues raised.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Your co-operation and time that you have given in filling in the questionnaire is highly appreciated. I thank you once again. The data will be kept strictly confidential and will be used only for research.

Would you be prepared for a further interview on the issues raised in this questionnaire? If yes, would you kindly give your address and contact number (if available) so that I can get back to you at a time that is most convenient for you.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____